

THRILLER

Gordon Ashe

**TERROR BY
DAY**

Hutchinson's
**Free
Victory Gift**
for
the Forces

This is one of the 1,000,000 Books given Free
by Walter Hutchinson, Esq., on behalf of
Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd.,
and the Hutchinson Printing
Trust, Ltd. mark the
Glorious Victories.

A. 31
COMPUTER

TERROR BY DAY

By
GORDON ASHE

Author of
"The Speaker", "Death on Demand",
"Secret Murder", "'Ware Danger",
"Death in High Places", "There Goes Death"



SLIGHTLY ABRIDGED

Published for
THE CRIME BOOK SOCIETY
by **STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD.**
47 Princes Gate, London, S.W.7

1661



April 2

1661

CHAPTER I

MR. DAWLISH PROTESTS

IT was not, said Patrick Dawlish, that he had a serious complaint against life, a sense of something lacking that he needed to remove. Nor had he the slightest urge to put the world to rights. He did not consider it a perfect world, but certainly he could not grumble at his share of it, for it was unlikely that he would spend more than half of his capital during his life—periods of revolution, of course, not allowed for; Dawlish, however, was sceptical of the likelihood of revolutions in England.

Social upheavals apart, there would always be criminals, just as there would always be an efficient and effective police organization—epitomized, of course, in Scotland Yard. He admired the London policeman, be his helmet of cloth or steel; and if he was not *persona grata* with every man at the Yard above the rank of sergeant, at least Chief-Inspector Trivett was a friend of his. Through Trivett, and because of the activities of certain gentry who had demanded Dawlish's participation in—said the Press—the fight against crime, he had come to know more about Scotland Yard than most citizens.

He did not join the motley who cavilled at any mistake the Yard might make, or complained bitterly of any failure. On the contrary, he marvelled at the infrequency of their mistakes; he was fascinated—and at times, he said, appalled—by the thoroughness of the organization and the completeness of the preparations against lawlessness. Not only did he realize fully the competence of the Yard's systematic investigations on all crimes from murder to misbehaviour in a park, but he marvelled at the way in which those officers he knew controlled the system. Trivett, for instance, was a fount of information on any subject; to Dawlish it seemed that to become an inspector one had to be omniscient, with the memory of Datas, the ingenuity of Houdini, and at times the ability to dispense with sleep.

He would not, he admitted frankly, like to be a policeman.

And yet, he complained, there were times when the very Fates appeared determined to make him one, or as near as made no difference. He made this remark bitterly on a fine spring morning to no less a person than Trivett, who called, spruce and immaculate and yet troubled, at Dawlish's newly rented Brook Street flat. Instead of admitting his appreciation of it, Trivett said abruptly:

"Dawlish, are you busy just now?"

Dawlish, who at six feet one inch topped Trivett by two inches, was a large man, and but for a broken nose he would have been handsome. The early sun—early for him, it was ten o'clock—contrived to find a way into his Brook Street lounge, where a shaft shone on his fair hair, the thick lines of his eyebrows, and the blue, clear, and wide-set eyes. The broken nose was generous, yet did not seem out of place, for his features were large and there was ruggedness about his square, grooved chin, his full lips parted just then to show large white teeth. A big man who was impressive, loose-limbed, and in loose-fitting silver greys which did justice to his figure and his tailor.

"Life is full, old man, even though I'm not in a reserved occupation and they haven't called my age class up for active service yet." The remark—Trivett knew—was a little bitter, for Dawlish had been abroad at the outbreak of hostilities, and after a belated return due to the inconsistencies of shipping, he had found there was no room for the able-bodied unless they also possessed qualifications which were not his. "What's more," went on Dawlish with spirit, "there appear to be three volunteers for every A.R.P. post vacant in the only area for which I'm qualified. I've very nearly been reduced to becoming a special constable, but——"

"Don't fool," said Trivett irritably. "You're not the only one who wants to be doing something but can't find a way. It's your own fault for not seeing it coming and getting in somewhere then."

"*Touche*," said Dawlish.

Trivett took out cigarettes.

"Now we've got over that," he said, "perhaps you'll listen to me." He was that rare thing, a good-looking man who also seemed intelligent; there was no stamp of 'police' about him.

Dawlish struck a match. "What's the trouble?"

"I don't know. You might be able to help."

"Well, it looks as though I'd start from scratch," said Dawlish resignedly. "No large-scale crime offensive, is there?"

Trivett frowned. "Pat, if you were told there was large-scale crime, what would you think the most likely type just now? War conditions acknowledged, I mean."

Dawlish hesitated, knowing that Trivett was serious, and said slowly:

"Drugs?"

"Ah," said Trivett, and he seemed relieved. "Did you just judge from the—er—need for something to forget, or——"

"Or," said Dawlish. "There's a lot about, of course, much more than there was before the war. I had wondered what you were thinking about it. Didn't I hear a whisper about a drive against it, back in September?"

"Yes, there was. We cleaned up most of the known or sus-

pected channels, and for a few weeks there was a definite decrease. Now it's flooding the market, and we can't find where it's coming from. It's very difficult to smuggle anything into the country, but I'm practically certain that there aren't many stocks about. All the same, cocaine and heroin and opium are far too prevalent. Particularly in your set."

"I'm a man of the world, not Mayfair," said Dawlish. "Have a drink, it'll cheer you up."

"Thanks." Trivett drank, and smiled a little, although not altogether in amusement. "One way and the other we're so busy that we don't know which way to turn. We've a couple of sergeants, both good men, on the look-out for suppliers; but if I or anyone else starts giving it full attention, in comes a new spot of Alien Order trouble or something else to make us break off. Damned unsatisfactory, Pat, and I was talking to the A.C. this morning. You were mentioned."

Dawlish eyed the inspector without approval. Sir Archibald Morely, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, was not a man to talk lightly and for the sake of talking.

"I," said Dawlish severely, "am not a drug-trafficker, nor taker, nor investigator."

"Oh, don't be an ass. Will you keep your eyes open for anything that might give us some help? I know you're not anxious to go into it again, but——"

"On the two occasions when I've been in 'it,'" said Dawlish gently, "it has not been approved for a long time. In fact, you've been obstructive where you could be, which isn't meant personally. And why should I risk wind and limb and neck, for that matter, doing a job which isn't mine?"

"You'd be doing a job that wouldn't be necessary if it weren't for the war," Trivett pointed out, "and you'd be doing something useful instead of taking other men's girls out to lunch. And probably you won't be risking anything."

"That wasn't said with conviction," said Dawlish, and smiled. "Worried, old man?"

"I am—in fact, we are," admitted Trivett. "Drugs can play Old Harry at the best of times, and just now they're liable to be the devil. There's a youngster at the Foreign Office who's been selling minor secrets, his payment being mostly in snow. The cover-up was damned efficient; we got at two of his suppliers, but then met a blank wall. Awbridge, the Third Under-Secretary at the Admiralty, has been off-colour for some days; cocaine again, although he swears he hasn't taken it knowingly; we're trying to find how it's been administered. Anyhow, that gives you an idea how serious it might be." He broke off, eying Dawlish expectantly, and the large man frowned.

A man under the influence of drugs would talk so much more easily, either by accident or by intention—the intent being

to obtain further supplies of drugs. That there were efforts to get the stuff into high places was disturbing but easily understandable—one of the cleverer Nazi tricks, and many *were* clever. He was well aware of the trust implied by Trivett's statement, knew that the Yard was always reluctant to call on anyone for assistance unless it be a pathologist or a technical expert. In short, it was a compliment rarely bestowed, and yet he was not sure that he appreciated it.

In him there was no urge to investigate crime, which made it the more annoying, since he had twice been successful in doing so. No small affairs, either, for Pat Dawlish was not a victim of false modesty. There had been the first¹ when he had hauled a live thief from his window, to find a dead man by the time the thief had reached his room; that had been at the home of Sir Jeremy Pinkerton, his maternal uncle and one of his few relatives. The personal element had been considerable, too, in the second² affair, when one of London's lovelies had appealed to him for help.

Trivett was not one of London's lovelies.

But Trivett was doing something that obviously he hated, asking what amounted to a favour of someone he knew would be reluctant to grant it, while breaking an unwritten law of the C.I.D. Trivett was patently uncomfortable——

And he had presented a strong case.

"Is it official? The request, I mean?"

"If you want it so, yes. Preferably we'd like you to keep your eyes open." Trivett remained uncomfortable, and his eye wandered again towards the whisky.

"Don't stand there like a gawk," said Dawlish unkindly, 'go and help yourself. What you mean, my Trivett, is that you think if I get going at all, I'll forget prejudice and go the whole hog. Don't dissimulate, it's not worth the time."

Trivett stared, and then he chuckled.

"You'll do," he said, and he seemed much less on edge. "I'm glad you're going to help us, Dawlish, and it might be as well for the time being if you're strictly unofficial. We'll give you all the help you need, of course, but——"

"If I come a cracker, the Yard preserves its unsullied record," said Dawlish. "I know. It sounds suspiciously like passing the buck, my Triv."

"It isn't. We're worried. We need someone moving in——"

"Say it. My 'set', whatever that may mean."

"Someone who can get entry to various places without arousing suspicion," said Trivett equably; "and you can. For instance, two night-clubs still operating have a large proportion of addicts, the Night Templar and the Black Out. Know them?"

Dawlish widened his eyes.

¹ *The Speaker*. ² *Death on Demand*. Both by Gordon Ashe.

"So you'd got them up your sleeve, had you? Nothing doing as far as your men are concerned?"

"No, it all seems straightforward at both places, but——"

"A nice, convenient little word, 'but'," said Dawlish. "All right, I'll do a spot of bottle-partying the moment you provide me with extra petrol coupons." He grinned again. "No promises, and it might be a fizzle, you know."

"We'll risk that," said Trivett, and he seemed confident. "Don't run your head into too much danger."

"My game, my rules," said Patrick Dawlish firmly. "By the way, I've let my licence for a lethal weapon lapse; fix it for me, will you? I can supply the guns and ammunition."

Trivett chuckled. "You're on a drug-hunt, not a man-hunt."

"Now wouldn't it be strange," said Pat gently, "if they should happen to coincide?"

CHAPTER II

MR. CUNNINGHAM IS PERTURBED

INTO the orbit of Pat Dawlish, some two hours after he had talked with Trivett, came Mr. Andrew Cunningham. There was little surprising in that, for they were members of the Cranton Club, and also habitués. Cunningham was a tall young man—five years Dawlish's junior—somewhat lean and a trifle melancholy on the mornings after. His face, long and lean, lent itself to melancholy, as did his brown eyes, so large and faithful and at times appealing, although he objected to being told they were like a doe's.

Andy Cunningham's one claim to fame was his number of engagements. There was some argument even among the best-informed circles as to whether he had plighted his troth six times or seven, but so far he had not taken to himself a spouse. His repertoire included film actresses, stage-stars, one chorus girl, and an Austrian countess, as well as an American heiress. With them all Andy remained good friends, finding no embarrassment when circumstances threw him and two of them together. It was rumoured, about the time that he encountered Dawlish in the smoking-room of the Cranton, that he was contemplating his seventh or eighth engagement, this time to the daughter of a little-known peer. The daughter was also little known, a surprising thing, since Andy usually chose a celebrity.

He was smoking a cigarette and sitting in one of the enormous chairs of the Cranton, with a paper on his knees.

"Could you," said Dawlish from his side, "be sad about something, Andy?"

Cunningham had not seen Dawlish approaching, but he showed no surprise as he eyed the large man sorrowfully.

"I could," he said, and his voice was deep, while it was not kept low, as the rules of the Cranton Club smoking-room demanded. "What is more, I am."

"No lunch engagement?" demanded Dawlish.

"Two, as a matter of fact—I haven't decided which one to cut." Cunningham scowled, dubbed out his cigarette, and rose. "I'm going to have a drink, come and help me."

"Drink or decide?"

"Both." Ignoring the glared protests of the members, they strolled outside and downstairs to the bar, where one could talk in a normal voice and not be frowned upon. "All joking apart, Pat, I'm in a jam. You know I'm engaged to Betty?"

"I did hear rumours, yes."

Cunningham grinned.

"Nicely put. Well, it's more than a rumour, and between you and me it's serious. That girl is—well, we won't take up all the time talking about Betty; she's just taken hold of me and shown me what a damned fool I was in the past and"—Cunningham, for him, was intensely serious—"let me tell you, Pat, if anything goes wrong between me and Betty, I just won't give a damn for anything."

"Need anything go wrong?"

"I suppose it needn't, but I can't expect even Betty to be angelic about everything, can I? Everything was all right until Chloe cropped up again." Cunningham eased his collar, reached the bar, and ordered a large beer for Dawlish and a sidecar for himself. "I was fond of Chloe," he admitted, "but between you and me, I don't think she would have said 'yes' if she hadn't been tight. I know I wouldn't have asked her, but you know how it is. Anyhow, we parted good friends and all that, about a couple of months ago—no, it's longer than that, just after the war started—and I've seen her a dozen times since and everything's been friendly and smiling. And now," went on Andy Cunningham sorrowfully, "she rings me up and asks me to have lunch with her. Says she wants to talk to me seriously and she doesn't know anyone else who'll do. I mean, what else could I say but 'yes'? After all," added Andy ingenuously, "I thought Betty would be out of town."

"Thought," said Dawlish with emphasis.

"Well, I got the weeks mixed up," said Cunningham miserably. "I thought Betty would be away this week; instead of that it's next week, and I'm due to lunch with her at the Regal, and Chloe at the Superb. If I let Betty down she's bound to find out why, and if I let Chloe down she might raise a stink. She's fiery, you know. Worst of it is, she sounded a bit flurried and whatnot over the 'phone yesterday, wanted to see me right away, but I was engaged." He finished his sidecar and ordered another. "I wish I'd had beer. Well, there it is. I don't mind."

telling you," added Cunningham, "that if I thought it would work I'd ask you to tackle Chloe for me, but it's impossible. I thought she was settling down, too; she's been with Morrell at the Black Out every night for a month."

Dawlish stirred. "Where?"

"The Black Out," said Andy gloomily. "Just about what I feel at the moment, old man. Blacked right out, polished right off. I suppose I'll have to toss for it."

"Don't play the fool," said Dawlish urgently. "Keep your appointment with Betty, I'll handle Chloe."

Andy stared unbelievably.

"You'll handle *Chloe*? Losh, man, if she loses her temper you'll be the talk of the town! Hang it, you know Chloe."

Dawlish did.

Chloe Farrimond had made a hit in musical comedy at the tender age of seventeen, and in some miraculous way had not gone back since. She was nearly thirty, although she did not look her age; she was tiny and very lovely, but with red hair and all that red hair is supposed to mean. Her temperament was abhorred by every manager in London who considered putting on a musical comedy, but the competition for her services was always fierce. Even with the staggered hours for theatres she was in great demand; there was no question of her talent for singing *risqué* songs—or, for that matter, the good old-fashioned ballad. She had 'it' or 'oomph', the public raved over her. Hollywood agents tried to bribe her into films with fantastic contracts—and failed. Chloe was not so much in the news as the news itself—the only actress, it was justly claimed, who had received a front-page mention during Crisis days.

It was absurd, thought Dawlish, to commit himself to Chloe for that lunch-time, and for Andy himself he might not have made the sacrifice. But he was interested in the Black Out Club and—more subconsciously than otherwise—there was the fact that she had been 'flurried and whatnot'.

"Well, I'm glad you think it's funny," said Cunningham with relief. "I wouldn't. If you think you can make excuses, ole man—I didn't ask you, remember, don't blame me for whatever happens!—and if you could slide in a discreet mention of Betty, fine. You know, I've really been sober about this business."

"I'll see what I can do," promised Dawlish. "What time's the appointment?"

"One-fifteen."

"I'll be there on the dot, and she'll have no complaints about that. Go and eat with your Betty, little man, and brood over the iniquities of deception. Oh, and there's another thing."

Cunningham frowned.

"I thought there'd be a catch. What is it?"

"Are you a member of the Black Out?"

"I'll say. Founder member, what's more."

"Well, I want to be," said Dawlish, "and I'm thinking of going along there tonight."

"I'm taking a party," said Cunningham promptly. "Betty's crazy about night-clubs, it's a thing I'll have to cure her of. I'll be there around ten, just ask for me and they'll let you in."

"Thanks, old man, I'll be drifting."

The Superb was in Shaftesbury Avenue, and the Cranton in Pall Mall, which meant a fifteen minutes' walk if he took it leisurely. He was pensive, but not about the sand-bagged statues, nor the other evidence of Air-Raid Precautions including solitary A.A. guns with their crews near by. There was a noticeable decrease in traffic even at Trafalgar Square and along the Haymarket, and what few youngsters he saw were either obviously unfit or in uniform. He grimaced, for he wanted badly to be in uniform.

Drugs were not pleasant things.

Stopping their distribution might be no easy task, but one worth while. He smiled sombrely, for he saw no reason why he should be able to stop it; it was his habit in all things to take them as they came, rarely planning any campaign. Trivett's faith and that of the Assistant Commissioner was a pleasing thing but probably unfounded. Perhaps more than anyone else Dawlish realized that an ability to act fast while often thinking afterwards had seen him through many a difficulty.

If he was able to get busy on the drug game—'game' suited it as far as he was concerned—it would provide an interest in life. Already he found himself warming to the task, with great hopes of results from a visit to the Black Out Club.

But first Chloe.

He reached the splendid foyer of the Superb at ten past one, was acknowledged by the reception clerk and two commissionaires, but there were no acquaintances there. He was prepared to wait for fifteen minutes before seeing Chloe, and he picked up a magazine. Glancing at his watch he found that it was twenty-to-two. He frowned at himself, and hoisted his large body from the easy-chair. The nearer commissionaire eyed him expectantly.

"Has Miss Farrimond been in?" asked Pat Dawlish.

"No, sir, not yet, sir."

And then for the first time Dawlish saw the man in grey.

Many men could be dressed in grey and yet not be noticeably grey men; this man was noticeable. His suit, of good cut, was of clerical grey; so was his tie. A white shirt showed little, for the V of the waistcoat was shallow, while his hair was grey, a peculiar shade of grey that matched his clothes; and he had grey eyes—of a slate shade that was unusual.

Trivett would have said that Dawlish did not give himself full credit for many things; Dawlish picked up those facts in a

quick, comprehensive glance, and then returned to his chair. He was not, however, to be allowed to read again, for a shadow came between him and the window, and the man in grey said drably:

"Excuse me, sir. You were asking for Miss Farrimond?"

"That's right," said Dawlish, and if he was suddenly interested beyond the merits of the question he did not show it.

"I am afraid, sir"—the colourless voice suited the man perfectly; it was devoid of expression and of accent, it was low-pitched and monotonous—"that Miss Farrimond has been unavoidably detained. She is, however, particularly anxious to see you."

Dawlish experienced a moment of sharp irritation: the man talked as if he were conjugating verbs in a little-known tongue—that 'however' had been badly out of place. But he smiled, and he felt his interest quickening, for this grey man—a man of more than medium height although somehow he looked short—was not the type normally to be associated with Chloe.

"Where?" he asked.

"At her flat, sir, in de Mond Street. Will it be asking too much of you to come with me?"

"I don't think so," said Pat Dawlish, "although I hope she will find me some lunch. Isn't she well?"

"I have no information to the contrary, Mr. Cunningham, but you will doubtless be able to learn from her at first-hand."

It was almost impertinence, decided Dawlish, but he did not say so. The use of Andy's name reminded him that he was being taken for that careless swain, and he was also reminded of the fact that Chloe was not likely to be pleased with a substitute. That could be risked, for Chloe to send a messenger, instead of to drop an appointment without a second thought was proof enough that she really wanted to see Andy. Why should she be so anxious to talk with a one-time fiancé—moreover, a fiancé who had become such more or less by accident? It puzzled and intrigued him, and he followed the grey man to a car, a Packard that gleamed new and brilliant in the sun. There was a chauffeur waiting, and the man opened the door with alacrity. Chloe had been thoughtful.

And then Pat Dawlish had the first shock of the affair of Chloe. For in the tonneau of the Packard was another man dressed in grey, as nondescript to look at as the first, except that he was smiling, and in his right hand was an automatic, fitted with a Maxim silencer.

Dawlish gaped.

"Come in, Mr. Cunningham," said the man in grey. "I am most anxious to see you. Please don't be disturbed, I hope I shall not need to use this."

And he waved the gun in Dawlish's face, while the second grey man half pushed Dawlish further into the tonneau, joined him, and sat down without a word. The chauffeur was already

at the wheel, and the Packard moved swiftly into the stream of traffic in Piccadilly. The first movement made Dawlish sit down abruptly, but he retained sufficient presence of mind to realize that the curtains of the car were drawn. He could not see anything either side of him. The face of the man with a gun seemed more shadowy than ever, but the gun itself was motionless.

While Dawlish wondered what would happen when it was known that Andrew Cunningham was a mile or more away.

CHAPTER III

WHY ?

THERE were a host of other whys in Dawlish's mind. He was wary but not afraid of the man with the gun, for he had faced guns unexpectedly too often to let it worry him, and as he breathed, his face expressionless in the gloom, the man in grey spoke again. The voice was colourless, and yet held a distinct expression ; it might have been of warning or of threat. To Dawlish the most absurd thing of that mad few minutes was the gun in the other's hand. His grey was so clerical that it was like being held up by a reverend gentleman ; it was impossible to believe the gun might be used.

"You dislike talking, perhaps," said the man in grey.

Dawlish rubbed his chin, and surreptitiously felt his hip-pocket with his elbow ; the hard lump of his own automatic was there ; he was glad that he had put one in his pocket before coming out.

"I'm subject to surprises," Dawlish said, "it causes vocal paralysis—but it doesn't last long, you see."

"No-o." In the gloom the other's face seemed pale and worried, his expression was in keeping with his clothes. "I'm glad it doesn't last long, for I have several questions to ask you, and it would be most unfortunate if you were tongue-tied. You aren't frightened, are you ?"

"What of ?" asked Dawlish, and he felt more at ease.

"The gun, Mr. Cunningham."

"I was taught," said Dawlish gently, "to be afraid of the man behind the gun instead of the gun itself. I can't be, Mr.—"

"My name is Grey."

Dawlish had a shock, although he admitted that he should not have had. The pause after the 'Mr.' had been one of the simplest of try-ons, and he had expected no answer at all. The 'Grey', so obviously right, startled him, but did not rob him of his sang-froid. He saw through the windscreen that the car had turned off at Grosvenor Place, and that they were now travelling towards Victoria.

Chloe Farrimond's flat was near the station ; *could* they be going to see Chloe ?

"Thank you, Mr. Grey. And this gentleman?" He lifted a hand to indicate the third occupant of the car, and Mr. Grey inclined his head.

"Also Grey. He is my brother."

"I've always wanted a brother," said Dawlish faintly.

"I'm so glad you are friendly," said Mr. Grey.

"Dare I ask what you want?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Grey, and he seemed really apologetic. "That subject must be deferred, but not for long. Now I want to give you some instructions. We shall reach Miss Farrimond's flat very shortly, and you will leave the car on your own. I shall sit inside, with the door open, and there will be someone else watching not far away. You will go straight into the building, where Miss Farrimond's flat is on the ground floor—but I need not give you those details, you will be well-acquainted with them. Should"—Mr. Grey's voice sank low, and yet held a sharp note that was almost of menace, and its contrast to his earlier tone sent a shiver down Dawlish's spine—"should you be foolish enough *not* to go straight in, I shall have to shoot you. It will be inconvenient, but necessary."

Dawlish stared. "My dear man, are you mad?"

"You would be surprised," said Mr. Grey unexpectedly. "Follow those instructions carefully, Mr. Cunningham. You will be told what to do inside the flat. Do it, or"—he shrugged—"it will be so unfortunate; death is always so final. Don't, please, misunderstand me. I am quite serious."

Dawlish knew it, knew that if he made a false move it would bring a bullet in his back. He told himself that if he managed to get away with a whole skin he would travel in future with a chain waistcoat; it looked as if one would be necessary. This might be fantastic but it was grimly serious; there was death in the hands of the grey man sitting there.

It flashed through his mind that Andy would have acted much as the other had expected, in the same circumstances; and from that it was not a far jump to ask *why* Cunningham should be subjected to this. The solemn-faced man with the dry sense of humour—a little weather-beaten that morning—could surely not have manœuvred him into this?

Dawlish refused to believe that.

He refused to believe that Chloe had sent for him this way, and yet they were outside the block of luxury flats where London's loveliest termagant had two ground-floor apartments knocked into one. In a daze, he moved towards the door, which Mr. Grey's brother opened obligingly, and as he stepped out he heard Grey's voice:

"Be *very* careful, Mr. Cunningham."

Dawlish hesitated for a moment on the pavement. He glanced right and left, and saw three pedestrians, all men, all of whom

might be watching. There was one car, a small one, drawn up outside the main entrance, but no porter was in sight.

"*Quickly.*" Grey's ghostly voice came from the car.

Dawlish stepped forward. Had there been a reasonable chance of a breakaway he doubted whether he would have taken it, for he wanted to know more—very much more. He was trying to believe that this affair could be associated with Trivett's vague suspicions of the Black Out Club, yet to expect that was to ask too much of the long arm of coincidence.

To believe in the affair at all was to suspect his mental balance. He was on a stretch as he entered the spacious hallway, where the walls were designed in futurist fashion in streaks of red, green, and yellow. Dawlish stepped to the only door in sight, ten yards inside the hallway. Before he tapped he looked through the open front door, and he glimpsed Mr. Grey, sitting drab and colourless, in the tonneau of the Packard.

He tapped.

The door opened almost before his hand had left the tiny knocker, but he saw no one in front of him. From behind the door a sharp voice said :

"Come in."

Dawlish stepped in. The door was closed and a man stepped from behind it; Dawlish found it a relief that he saw a suit of Harris tweed. But the face of the wearer was more in keeping with the activities of Grey. It was a florid, beetle-browed face, with the eyes set too deeply and too close together, a short nose, and lips which could not properly close over prominent and yellow teeth. The man had his right hand in his coat pocket.

"Okay, no tricks now. Go straight through."

There was only one door to choose from, and Dawlish saw that it was ajar. More vividly than ever he felt the unreality of the situation ; its clockwork precision did nothing to alleviate that feeling. This was Chloe's flat, occupied by at least one roughneck who seemed thoroughly at home, and who was obviously carrying out carefully planned arrangements. He was prepared to see anything when he went into the second room, from Chloe lying dead to Chloe standing in front of him with a gun. He was even prepared to find that it was a hoax.

The room, Chloe's private lounge, did not hold Chloe.

Dawlish faced a man as tall as himself, and as broad across the shoulders. A man remarkable for the pallor of his face and the brilliance of his blue eyes, which seemed exaggeratedly large and so brilliant that they looked feverish. It was like looking at a ghost of a man whose eyes were alive, and Dawlish felt a spasm in his stomach. The first part had been fantastic, this was grotesque.

"Come in, Cunningham." A deep voice, holding a faint guttural note, seemed out of place from that pallid face, even

though it suited the figure. It was natural, far more than either of the Greys had been.

And obviously this man had never met Pat Dawlish.

Pat pushed the door behind him, and he saw that the man did not hold a gun, but showed his hands. They were long, white, and slim, the wrong hands for such a giant. The fact that there was no gun, and the touch of his own against his thigh, gave him more confidence than he had felt since he had entered the car, and he said with an effort:

"May I know what this tomfoolery is about?"

"You'll be well advised not to talk like that," said the pale-faced man. "Sit down, Cunningham—that's right. Now listen carefully. Two months ago Miss Farrimond gave you a present—a parting present—of a pair of silver-backed hair-brushes."

"Oh," said Dawlish blankly. If the man had butted him in the stomach he could not have been more winded. "I—er—supposing she did?"

"Where are they?" The question came sharply.

"On my dressing-table—where else would you expect?"

The pale-faced man did not appear to relish sweet reason, for he barked:

"Don't lie! Your flat's been turned out twice, they're not anywhere there."

"Oh," said Dawlish, still more blankly.

"When did you open them?" snapped the other, and this time Dawlish gaped.

"Open them? *Hair-brushes?*"

It was then that the affair changed from one of fantasy to fact, for the big man moved. He moved with a startling speed, quite deceiving Dawlish, who had no time to avoid the buffet which the clenched right hand gave him. It struck him in the neck, a tender spot, and dazed him; and yet it angered him. He was no longer filled with bemusing questions; he felt a cold rage against the striker, and with difficulty he kept his hands from clenching.

"Now perhaps you'll talk," said the other roughly. "I'm not here to waste time. The brushes, or——"

He did not say what he meant, but he conveyed it; and Dawlish was filled with a sudden fear which sent rage packing. For from a shoulder-holster a silenced Mauser had leapt into the other's right hand—while Dawlish, not being Cunningham, could not give any information.

And unless he did it seemed that he might die.

CHAPTER IV

ACTIVITY IN A FLAT

HE could tell the truth, but he doubted whether it would help him, for he was not likely to be believed. He could invent some

story of giving the brushes away, or selling them; but it would be so transparent a ruse that the man with the brilliant eyes would most likely get violent. Now he stood staring down at Dawlish, his gun not a yard from Dawlish's broken nose; he was a fanatic if ever there was one in this world—and therefore barely responsible for his actions.

The threat eased in Dawlish's mind, but the pain of and anger at the blow remained.

"The brushes, or . . ." said Dawlish more gently than he felt. "My dear good man, if you tried for a year you wouldn't get those brushes. I'm not frightened, you know, nothing like so frightened as you are without them."

Why should he be desperate for a parting gift from Chloe to Andy Cunningham?

"You—you have guessed that," said the big man. "You are much cleverer than I had been led to believe, but not as clever as you imagine. Be advised, Cunningham, don't make me force you to talk, it would be painful."

"It would be impossible," said Dawlish; "you overrate yourself and your second-rate theatricals." He stood up as he spoke, and was not stopped: the gun was moved back two feet, so that it remained a yard from him. "Those brushes are quite safe and they'll remain quite safe."

"I—see." The words were simple, but not spoken pleasantly. The pale-faced man stepped to the wall, and his long hand sought for a bell-push; he did not move his eyes from Dawlish's. "Bilson has a way with him, Cunningham; others have proved obstinate. I don't wish to make things unpleasant, but you've roused my curiosity. What made you put the brushes away?"

Pat grinned. "Let's call it sentiment."

"Cunningham, how much do you know?"

"How much could Chloe let out?" asked Dawlish easily. "Not much, but enough to make me think very hard. And you know I have never liked dope. Odd, isn't it?"

It was a long shot, one of the longest Dawlish had made. If he had seen rage in the other's eyes before he now saw naked madness. He felt a surge of exhilaration that was rare. This *was* part of the drug-racket; his half-formed association of Chloe's 'flurried and whatnot' and the Black Out Club had not been groundless.

"You——"

"Be careful with that gun!" snapped Dawlish.

It was the simplest thing. He moved sharply to one side and half-turned, as if afraid of a bullet. Turning, he put his right hand inside his trousers pocket, gripping his own gun. He wasted no time, jerked it upwards inside the pocket, released the safety-catch and fired, all while he was speaking. Firing, he moved again—and he saw the other man stagger, saw the gun

fall from his right hand. The bullet had struck the barrel——

Dawlish leapt.

The report of the shot, though half muffled by his trousers, was loud enough for the man outside to hear—the man who would be Bilson. Before Bilson broke in Dawlish had to work fast. He was on his man before the other had recovered from the shock of the shooting and while pain was still searing through his wrist. And Dawlish hit him, a pile-driver to the point with all the force in his great body.

The man staggered back, and his eyes rolled under the power of it. Dawlish flashed a left to the stomach, brought the other forward with chin thrust out. An upper-cut with the whole force of his body behind it sent his man rocketing backwards. It had been devastating; science and brute strength allied to a knowledge of his danger.

The man was still falling when Dawlish swung round towards the door. His knuckles were grazed but he was unaware of the pain as he went for his gun again. The door opened abruptly, as he expected it would. Bilson was not in sight, he liked staying behind doors. Dawlish stepped to the wall where he could just see the door—and he saw Bilson's right hand move slowly round, with the ugly snout of a silencer-fitted Mauser.

He fired.

The Mauser went flying and Bilson yelped with the pain as the gun was wrenched from his fingers. He jumped, too, into sight—and again Dawlish moved, with all the speed that made him a man to fear. He gripped Bilson's arm and dragged the man into the smaller room and then pushed him violently, where Bilson struck the outstretched body of his employer, and fell backwards, with barely time to realize what was happening.

Dawlish stood by the door, his gun in his hand, his expression bleak and expectant. He waited for perhaps thirty seconds. No sound came, there was no suggestion of others in the flat. There might be an interruption from outside, of course, the shooting must have been heard——

His lips twitched suddenly.

He remembered the sensation caused two years before, when Chloe had announced to the world that she was making her flat sound-proof because it was the only way she could sleep. With the doors and windows closed there was little chance of the shooting being heard outside. It was the most satisfying thought Dawlish had known since he had entered the Packard.

But he did not remain satisfied for long.

The tables were turned, but he must make a decision quickly. How much good would come from handing these men to the police? How important were they? Just why had the word 'drugs' brought an insane glare into the bigger man's eyes? How much would the police be able to learn from him? There were

charges enough to hold him, and to make him liable for seven years' imprisonment.

There was just one thing where Dawlish believed he could improve on the police, and that was the fault of regulations and not policemen. 'My game, my rules,' he had told Trivett, and Trivett had known what he meant. Among the things he could do was to exercise third-degree far more effectively than the whole of the Yard put together.

How could he get the men out of the flat?

He frowned suddenly. Why get them out of the flat? Thanks to Chloe's whimsy it was as good a place for operating as anywhere, provided there was no interruption from outside. As the thought flashed through his mind he glanced at the two men, seeing that the pale-faced gunman was lying with his eyes closed, and his breathing stertorous. Bilson was licking his lips, a nasty specimen not a little scared.

"Get up," Dawlish said.

Bilson hesitated, and Dawlish stepped forward and yanked him up by his coat-lapels.

"When I say move, move! Go through and lock and bolt the front door. I can see you from here, and I feel like more shooting." He shoved the man away from him and Bilson staggered, regained his balance and hurried to the front door, a very frightened man, to carry out Dawlish's order.

At the other's lips there was a faint bluish tinge, and the same thing was visible at his ears—remarkably small, pear-shaped, and very close to his head. The blueness perhaps showed more against the pallid skin than it would on a man of normal colour, but to Dawlish it spelt information: the fellow's heart was not sound.

Which explained the prolonged unconsciousness, and gave him time in which to work.

Bilson was coming back, his eyes not looking at Dawlish, and his prominent teeth parted as he breathed noisily.

"Move quicker," snapped Dawlish. "I want to check up on the back entrance. Lead the way."

The next room, leading out of Chloe's boudoir, would be her bathroom, he reasoned rightly. The bathroom led into the bedroom, for he saw the double bed as Bilson opened the door.

And then Dawlish had a shock, for on the floor, stretched out and unconscious, was Chloe Farrimond.

Chloe!

He wasted no time in cursing himself for not realizing that it was to be expected. As it was, he spent ten seconds too long in staring at the actress, whose lovely face was colourless, whose limpid eyes were closed.

Was she breathing?

It was then that Bilson moved.

Bilson touched the back of a chair, lifted it and flung it at Dawlish, and it was in the air before Dawlish realized what the roughneck was doing. He ducked and the chair went over his head, one leg striking his shoulder. As it went Bilson leapt at him—and proved that he had courage.

Dawlish could have shot him.

He did not, but waited—and he used the impetus of the other's rush to make his punch more telling. Bilson had no idea of a cover-up, and left his chin wide open. The *crack* / of the punch echoed loudly, and Bilson just swayed back and crumpled up.

Dawlish glanced automatically at his knuckles: they were bleeding, but not freely. He stepped to the bed, and took the coverlet off, using the thing to bind Bilson's legs and arms.

The big man stepped back into the dressing-room, forcing back a threatening panic about Chloe, for she looked so still and so much like death. The blue tinge on the 'Boss's' lips was pronounced, and for safety's sake Dawlish fastened his wrists with the black neck-tie taken from the unconscious man's neck. Finished, he went back to the bedroom.

He lifted Chloe easily, for she was no weight, a small woman who was inclined slightly to plumpness, but noticeable only because of her tiny frame. She was wearing a tailor-made costume and a white silk blouse, and in her pallor she looked sweet and innocent; which was not her reputation. There was a faint, subtle perfume about her, and he saw that in her clenched right hand there was a small silver-mesh handbag.

She had, then, been about to leave the flat when she had been attacked. As he rested her comfortably on the bed he felt for her pulse and detected the faint beating of the blood through her arteries. He left her wrist and pulled back an eyelid. The point of the pupil was so small that it was barely visible, and the lips of Patrick Dawlish tightened.

That suggested drugs.

There was no time for wondering whether she had been drugged into unconsciousness, or whether she made a habit of taking the filthy stuff. One thing was quite certain: he needed a doctor and he needed one quickly. But he also wanted to keep this thing as quiet as he could until after he had talked to the pale-faced man.

Thoughtfully he lifted the telephone and learned at once that it was in working order. He called the Cranton Club, remembering before he did so that Dr. William Farningham, who had been with him on the last affair when he and crime had fought, had sent him a card that had suggested he might get to London for a few days' leave. Farningham, who had no practice, but had been on the Medical Corps Reserve, had been six months without a spell from service in England.

As he heard the burring sound he wondered whether the luck

would break his way: certainly Bill Farningham would make his first call the Cranton.

And as he wondered, the two Mr. Greys approached the front door of Chloe Farrimond's flat, perturbed by the long silence.

CHAPTER V

ENTER BILL

"No, sir," said the clerk who answered Dawlish's call, "we have not yet seen Captain Farningham, but we are expecting him any minute. We received a wire reserving a room and—er—a meal at two o'clock, sir."

"And it's now——"

"Nearly half past, sir."

"My compliments to Mr.—sorry, Captain—Farningham," said Dawlish, "and ask him to forgo his meal and come to see me at Miss Chloe Farrimond's flat in de Mond Street. The moment he arrives, you understand, provided it's before two-forty-five. The matter is urgent and vital—stress that fact."

"Very good, sir." The clerk's dispassionate voice did something to dispel Dawlish's anxiety for Chloe, but as he replaced the receiver he wondered whether a delay even of half an hour might not be disastrous. He could so easily telephone Trivett and have a police-surgeon on the spot within ten minutes.

Saving Pale-face for himself was only one reason why he did not.

Chloe had been attacked, it was true; but Chloe had seemed worried, in Andy Cunningham's opinion, and Andy knew her too well to be deceived by a display of wilfulness. Chloe, in short, might not appreciate the attentions of the police; at least she should be saved from them for half an hour.

Thoughtful, worried, and curious, he stepped into the boudoir; and he found that the pale-faced man's eyes were flickering. He ignored that as he went through the other's pockets, taking out a wallet and a number of oddments that might be found in any pocket; the man did not stir, although Dawlish knew that now he was aping unconsciousness.

Dawlish glanced through the contents of the wallet and found nothing that seemed interesting on the surface. Unless an envelope, faintly blue, delicately perfumed, and addressed in feminine handwriting, could be termed interesting. The postmark was Victoria, and the envelope—quite empty—was addressed to:

*Wilfrid Askew, Esq.,
18 Snow Court,
London, N.W.8.*

"The St. John's Wood area," murmured Dawlish. "It might be the name of Pale-face here, although he doesn't look a Wilfrid. I'll attend to him, I think, when Bill and the others arrive."

He straightened up, turning his head away, but he paused as the man on the floor spoke sharply, forgetting that he was supposed to be unconscious.

"Cunningham!"

Dawlish turned. "So you're awake," he said sardonically.

"What others?" snapped Pale-face.

Dawlish frowned, and then smiled.

"Was I speaking aloud? I've friends, you know, and they can be as rough as Bilson—Bilson, by the way, can't be enjoying himself at the moment. I hit him as hard as I hit you."

"The day will come when——"

"I'll regret it? I have great doubts, for I'm going to make a nasty mess of you before handing you over to the police. That didn't occur to you, did it?"

"The—police?" Again Dawlish saw fear in the other's eyes, and then the pale face hardened. "You damned fool! The woman will spend the rest of her life in gaol if you do that. Cunningham, it's time you and I discussed this matter."

"Later, when I've reinforcements," said Dawlish. He was scowling as he turned away, for the talk of Chloe perturbed him. But if Bill was coming, he would have to be quick; he——

Brrr—brrr!

He thought for a moment that it was the telephone, but the ringing came from the front door. It was too fast upon his call for Bill Farningham, and Dawlish frowned as he stepped towards the other room.

He slipped his right hand into his pocket, about the butt of his gun, for he was prepared to find one of the Greys, although it was as likely that it was a caller for Chloe: he was already wondering where her maids had gone to.

He opened the door . . .

He saw both Greys.

The man who had talked in the car was first, and he held his right hand forward, then lifted it. Dawlish darted back, but he could not evade the small glass phial that burst into his face. He felt the biting sharpness of ammonia in his eyes and nose, and he could not prevent the spasmodic movement of his hands to his eyes—a movement that was fatal although already he had been outwitted. It might have been a fist or a foot that caught him in the groin, and he went reeling backwards, agony about him, making him quite helpless and defenceless.

"See to the others, Jonathan, I will look after him." The man who had thrown the phial looked distastefully but without rancour at Dawlish, who was on the floor with his knees drawn up into his stomach, and his hands covering his face. "He is a

remarkable man, this Cunningham, certainly not what expected."

Jonathan Grey hurried into the other rooms, while his brother hauled Dawlish towards a chair, but found him too heavy to lift. There was a vague, satisfied smile on the senior Grey's face—the Grey whose name was Lancelot.

Dawlish would be helpless for some minutes. Dawlish, in fact, was aware of nothing but the burning and the blindness in his eyes, and the ache in his groin where Lancelot Grey had in actuality kicked him. Grey stepped through, to find the pale-faced man sitting back in an easy-chair and drinking a whisky-and-soda. Jonathan was releasing Bilson.

"Exactly what happened, sir?" asked Lancelot Grey.

"Cunningham was too quick," the other said gruffly. "He turned the tables. I must admit it was smart. It's lucky you came when you did, Grey—how did you get in?"

"I rang twice," said Jonathan Grey with a smirk, "and there was no answering signal. I knew that something was wrong and I used one of those little ammonia phials. So useful, sir, although you considered them childish."

"All right, never mind that now. Cunningham used the telephone—others may be coming. Get the woman out of here quickly. And can you handle Cunningham?"

"He will be difficult, he's a considerable weight."

"Then put him away."

"The—brushes, sir?"

"We'll have to leave them. He's too dangerous to leave here: he's seen you two as well as me, and he's no fool. Understand—put him away, I'm taking no chances."

The big man stood up, peered at himself in the mirror, and scowled. "I'm going right away. Bilson's to follow to Sunningdale as soon as he can move decently."

He was entering the small car which Dawlish had seen parked outside the block of flats when a Lagonda turned into de Mond Street with Dr. William Farningham at the wheel. Dr. Farningham was in uniform and frowning. His dark, unruly hair needed attention, a fact obvious in spite of his peaked cap; his homely, good-humoured face was set in a scowl, and—although it was not obvious—his stomach was empty. He was secretly cursing Pat Dawlish, and in cursing passed the entrance to de Mond Mansions. The pale-faced man waited long enough to be sure of that and then turned the corner. As he turned, Bill Farningham stopped, complained aloud of his carelessness, and reversed into the drive.

Out of the car he proved to be a shorter man than the average, stocky and broad-shouldered, and quite at home in khaki. He hurried into the hallway, and as he started towards the door of No. 1 it opened.

From Chloe's flat stepped a man who clearly looked tough.

whose nose was swollen, and whose right eye was closing rapidly. Also there was a red bump on his chin. Farningham had seen many a free fight, and never the clearer signs of one than the unsuspecting Bilson presented. Into Bill Farningham's mind there sprang a considerable question-mark.

Pat was here, and there had been a 'rough-house.

The roughneck closing the door—it all happened in a matter of seconds, for Farningham could think almost as fast as Dawlish—was distinctly of the type not likely to be working with Dawlish, and Farningham's suspicions that there was trouble afoot were quickened. If the man was not for Pat, he was against, and if he was against and yet going free, that suggested trouble for Dawlish.

Inside the flat?

The man hurried outside and approached the waiting Packard. The chauffeur came from the wheel in response to a call, and both men started back for the flat. Bill turned into the shadows of the passage leading to other flats, but turned in time to see the door open, after he had heard two short rings. He scowled and fingered the Service revolver in his belt. He should not really be wearing the damned thing.

Bill drew a deep breath and rang sharply, twice, precisely as Bilson had done. Ringing, he drew his gun from its holster, and as he did so the door opened.

The expression on the face of the man Bilson was enough to tell him that there was major trouble—and Bilson's effort to bang the door failed. Farningham went through, the gun forcing a passage, and he saw Dawlish stretched out on the floor; saw a man who seemed nothing but a grey shadow standing in the communicating door with a small automatic in his hand—an automatic with the handle covered with a handkerchief.

"What the *hell*!" said Dr. William Farningham blankly.

And then he was visited by inspiration.

"Ted!" he yelled. "Percy! For the love of Mike——"

And then Bilson leapt at him.

Farningham did not hesitate, although a Service revolver made a lot of noise and the door was open. He fired, catching Bilson in the shoulder and sending the man round with the force of the bullet. He ducked, and a bullet from the small automatic went over his head.

And then a shout came from outside the flat.

Farningham realized subconsciously that the shout saved his life, for he was off his balance and could not have avoided a second bullet. But the grey man stiffened and looked towards the door. As he did so his brother came from the bedroom.

"What——"

"Let's get out!" snapped Lancelot Grey. "Shoot them down, but get out!" His voice was no longer colourless.

The chauffeur appeared behind the grey man, while both the Greys rushed for the door. Bilson was on the floor and gasping with pain. The door opened wider, Farningham caught a glimpse of a middle-aged man outside, a man who saw the guns and promptly dropped to his knees. Lancelot Grey fired over his head, but was more concerned with getting out. His brother and the chauffeur streamed after him, and by the time Farningham had got outside and the middle-aged man had recovered himself, the Packard was moving off. It went fast and Farningham snapped:

"See to my friend in there, I'm following."

He rushed for his Lagonda, discovered that he had left the engine running, and felt that the forgetfulness was a gift from Fate. He was wrong, for as the car moved the tyres flattened; rushed though they had been, the Greys had contrived to put a bullet in each of the two front wheels. Farningham swore, and saw the Packard swinging round the corner into Victoria Street.

And he also saw a policeman hurrying towards him.

"I heard——" the Robert was youthful and intent, and he believed he had heard shooting. But the sight of Farningham's uniform demanded some respect, while Bill said with an obviously forced effort to keep his temper:

"A blow-out—*two* blow-outs. Enough to waken the dead! Would you ruddy well believe it, Constable?"

CHAPTER VI

RECRUITS

THE constable believed it.

In the first place, the tyres had turned so that the bullet-holes were hidden, and they were so flat that a blow-out was the obvious explanation. Farningham was at some pains to explain that the roads, so-called, of the camp where he had driven from were filled with flints, that he had had no trouble while running, but obviously when stopped the tyres had burst. The constable was a trifle disappointed that there had been no shooting, but he went—after offering to call at a garage and having his offer refused firmly and with thanks.

Bill blew out his cheeks as the man went off.

"Phe-ew! Pat, my lad, haven't you any respect for the uniform of His Majesty's forces?"

He forgot his scare with the policeman and his disappointment at losing the two grey men and the chauffeur in sudden concern for Pat Dawlish, who had not looked at his fittest. He hurried to the flat, finding the door ajar, and he closed it firmly as he stepped through.

Dawlish was sitting on an easy-chair, and the middle-aged

stranger was bathing his eyes with water. They needed bathing, for they were red and swelling, and still tearful. Pat felt, in fact, as if he were eating hot ice, and the same unknown quantity was attacking his eyes. Farningham recognized the faintly acrid smell that hung about the room.

"Had an ammonia bath?" he inquired genially.

The middle-aged man snorted. Turning round, he faced Bill and presented a weather-beaten countenance with pleasant blue eyes, firm lips, a decided chin, and a military moustache that spelt 'Colonel Commanding' as nearly as Farningham could estimate. He was dressed in blue serge and he wore carpet slippers, incongruous at that moment.

The snort, it appeared, was a repressed laugh.

"That's *one* way of taking it," he admitted, and the timbre of his voice was pleasing, with still an accent faintly reminiscent of an officer-commanding: pleasant though it was, it possessed a ring of authority rarely found in quite the same degree outside the Forces. "Dare I inquire into this?"

"No one can stop you inquiring," said Bill amiably. "I don't know the first thing myself, except that my friend sent for me in a hurry and he appeared to need help. Feel like talking, Pat?"

Dawlish attempted to speak and made a peculiar sound that might have been 'no'.

"All right," said Farningham, "if you feel like that about it."

"*Co!*" gasped Dawlish, and he waved wildly towards the open door leading to the boudoir.

"Forgive him," said Farningham genially, "he's had a shock. I'll have a look at the bathroom, and——"

"*Clothes!*" howled Dawlish.

"Oh, *they're* all right."

Dawlish gulped, stood up abruptly, pointed to the next door, and Farningham went through.

He exclaimed: "Chloe, good Gad!" and the middle-aged man saw him disappear into the bedroom. Dawlish was left on his own while the stranger followed Bill.

Farningham shed the cloak of genial foolery, deliberately adopted to make Pat Dawlish feel less sorry for himself.

"All right, I'm a doctor. Try to find some boric acid for my friend's eyes, will you? A little sugar and water held in his mouth will help ease that, too. I'll look after her." He knelt by the side of the bed and made the same quick examination as Dawlish had done—and he reached the same conclusions. He was able to diagnose, provisionally, that she had been drugged with one of the lesser poisons, and that although she might be in a comatose state for some hours to come, and weak for days afterwards—being Chloe—the effect was not likely to be fatal.

He put an eiderdown over her and went back to Dawlish. It was ten minutes before he felt anything like himself, however,

and by that time the stranger had introduced himself as Colonel Adams, tenant of the next-door flat.

Farningham felt gratified at the confirmation of his theory.

"Thing I can't understand," he said as he proffered cigarettes. "is how others weren't roused: my gun went off like a rifle."

Adams smiled.

"Easily understandable, Captain——"

"Farningham."

"Captain Farningham. The other flats adjoining Miss Farrimond's are empty, they've been evacuated." He shrugged, a little disparagingly. "However, this matter must be reported."

Bill looked owlsh.

"Reported? To—oh, you mean the police." He looked at Pat, and in his look there seemed to be the question: 'Are you going to tell him the truth?'

Dawlish found his voice properly for the first time.

"Special Branch, Scotland Yard," he said, and he did not look at Bill. "There will be a full report on this, Colonel Adams, but for the time being your discretion would be appreciated."

Adams laughed, and smoothed his close-cut grey hair.

"Please, gentlemen. I'm not well-known, but I do know Pat Dawlish. After all, you've been in the headlines quite a bit, and——" he shrugged. "Frankly, I think the police should know about this, but if you've any particular reason——"

He broke off, and his silence was an invitation. Pat frowned, and then said carefully:

"There's reason in plenty, Colonel, but you're jumping off the wrong foot. I can call myself attached to the Special Branch of the Yard, for the purposes of this affair. Telephone Chief-Inspector Trivett, and confirm that statement. If he says 'yes', I want your word to let nothing of this affair pass your lips."

Adams' eyes wrinkled at the corners as he smiled, but he stepped immediately to the telephone. Farningham was regarding his friend sorrowfully, expecting Dawlish to make some attempt to get the Colonel away, believing Dawlish to be bluffing. He stared when Dawlish smiled as best he could, and almost gaped when Adams finished with the 'phone.

"Frankly, I didn't believe it," he said, "but Inspector Trivett confirms the statement. He appears anxious to see you, Mr. Dawlish."

"He'll have to wait," said Dawlish, and yawned. "Well now—a *résumé* of this business, friends. I had some reason to believe Miss Farrimond was being threatened, on a kidnap-cum-ransom angle, and it so happened I investigated at the right time. Though what would have happened if you hadn't arrived, Bill, I just don't know. Nor you, sir," he added for Adams' benefit. "It's hush-hush, for Chloe's sake of course. Much better if it doesn't come out, I think, at least until she's recovered."

But Colonel Robert Adams was not so easily convinced.

"Almost plausible," he said with a smile; "but it simply means you don't want to talk. You can rely on me—and on my wife, Mr. Dawlish. Now unless there's anything else I can do I'll go."

"Not at the moment, thanks," said Dawlish.

"Then I'll get upstairs. But call on me for anything. I'm hale and hearty even if the medical board doesn't entirely agree." He smiled ruefully, and Dawlish knew that he was another man doing nothing when he wished to be active.

"Oh, there's one thing," said Dawlish. "Doesn't Miss Farri-mond usually have two maids in the flat?"

"Yes, and a cook. Er"—Adams looked embarrassed. "I've heard it said that she sends them out occasionally."

Dawlish grinned. "Nothing doing this time; she was due to go out herself. Poor Chloe!"

"Actually I've a considerable regard for her," said Adams, "and Phyllis—my wife—has too. They're by way of being friends, or at least more than neighbourly. Well, remember I'm at your service at any time." Adams smiled again, and went out.

"The man's eating out of your hand, Pat."

"He's seen my name in the papers, which do wonderful things. He's by way of being a champion of Chloe, too, and obviously doubts whether she's as abandoned as folk would like to believe. She isn't, of course," Dawlish said absently. "Well, Bill. Nice of you to come. How long's your leave?"

"Ten days, and let me tell you that a week of it's engaged," said Farningham with spirit. "Diana's coming to town on Saturday, and not you, nor Chloe, nor the whole police force will get me in this kind of shindy once she's here."

"This is a day for faithful swains," said Dawlish regretfully. "Three days, is it? We might get through in the time, although I'm inclined to doubt it. But before we start talking, old man, we've arrangements to make. Chloe'll need nursing, of course. So we need a nice friendly nursing-home where they won't ask a lot of questions and won't object to a couple of flatfoots in the neighbourhood. Know of such a one?"

"Sister Em will look after her," said Farningham.

Sister Em, Dawlish knew, ran a small but exclusive nursing-home for the unfortunate ones of Mayfair. She was a large, bouncing woman, as good-natured as she was shrewd, and of the many secrets that entered her head, only those came out that did not matter. Thus she could pose both as a purveyor of information and a holder of confidences, and increase her prosperity. Nothing unlawful happened at her nursing-home in Bayswater, where she contrived to keep both her staff and her patients happy.

"Sister Em it is," said Dawlish. "I'd forgotten her. She can send a private ambulance, can't she?"

"Yes, I'll give her a ring." Farningham did so, while Dawlish

examined his face in a mirror and grimaced. He was still feeling the effects of the two rounds with Grey & Company, and he was not wholly satisfied. It remained a fact that he had lost two men who should have been quite incapable of further depredations. He did not altogether blame himself; the ammonia trick had the merit of effectiveness as well as simplicity.

More: he had heard of the silver hair-brushes, but he did not know their importance. He had been assured that if the police had taken the pale-faced man into custody, it would have meant imprisonment for Chloe: for some reason which he could not properly explain, Dawlish did not find that difficult to believe.

Those things, with the fact that he had no idea where to find the Greys or the others, finished the debit side. On the credit there was a reasonable balance. Not only was he still on the active list, but Chloe was reasonably well and for the time being at least safe. The Greys and their mentor had received unpleasant shocks, and might consider that in Andy Cunningham they had a difficult subject. He smiled at the thought of Andy in this situation, but finally decided that it was not funny.

The other credit item was the wallet and oddments from the pale-faced man's pockets.

Dawlish had them in his coat, and he looked through them again: but they offered little. There was a silver pencil and a gold cigarette-case, but neither was monogrammed. Nor was the wallet or the gold-hunter watch which he had annexed. He opened the back of it, hoping to find something worthy of interest, but the jewelled movements were all that met his eye. From the twenty-one pounds in notes of various denominations and the handful of silver and copper there was nothing to be derived.

Which left the envelope addressed to Mr. Wilfrid Askew, at 18 Snow Court, St. John's Wood. At least Mr. Askew might be worth interrogating, but that fact served to emphasize the misfortune of Chloe's drugged stupor: there was so much she might have said. And in time would say.

He was waiting to telephone a gymnasium in Aldgate High Street, from which two physically-perfect gentlemen of Cockney breed would gladly come and for a spell watch over Chloe at Sister Em's—he was determined for the time being to keep the essentials of the affair from the Yard, and hoped he could do so until Chloe had recovered. Waiting, he considered the broad outlines of the affair, and marvelled at the good fortune which had made him visit the Cranton, and thus talk with Andy Cunningham.

He was aware, if only vaguely, of an uncomfortable feeling that Andy could have known something of what was going to happen. It was unlikely, but many unlikely things had already happened.

Dawlish stopped thinking. Farningham was having some trouble with Sister Em's number and was complaining into the telephone as Dawlish reached the door leading into the front

room. And Dawlish uttered a profanity with feeling, making the doctor swing round.

"What——"

"We're a precious couple," growled Dawlish savagely. "We both forgot the swab. The man you wounded. He's gone, taking the bullet with him I shouldn't wonder. By jove, that man has pluck!"

CHAPTER VII

MR. ABRAHAM LARRAMY

THERE were other things remarkable about Mr. Abraham Larramy besides the fact that the five vowels in his name were all 'a'. Although Dawlish did not know his name nor where to find him, he would never forget Larramy's pallid face, or those feverish, brilliant eyes—eyes which seemed a little insane, although the man's actions were certainly sane enough. He had temperament, as those who worked for him knew only too well, and he could be violent. Yet in some things he was reasonable, and he rewarded good service with good wages.

One of the most remarkable things about him was that the police did not suspect his law-defying habits.

Larramy knew the inside of an American prison, but only for a short spell, and that for wife-desertion and ill-treatment.

Larramy, at fifty-three, had done so many intolerable things that, had his true history been recorded, no one would have believed it. Probably his least serious offence was rum-running before the Repeal, and jewel-smuggling after it. Although he used a gun only in emergency he was a remarkably good shot, and he liked to send his bullet between the eyes, taking what might be called a professional pride in so doing. He had handled dope for longer than he liked to remember, for he was conscious of middle age and like so many men who dispensed death freely, had a horror of it. He had also handled women, which was not nice. He looked on women, and had been heard to say so, as chattels; and he had dealt in as well as enjoyed them; only one whom he had so far known well did not curse his name—of those, that is, who remained alive to curse, or who had not forgotten him in their dreary existence in Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires.

He had sent three men, innocent of murder, to the electric chair when he should have been there himself. He had taken part in South American revolutions, supplying the ammunition, and on one dark occasion blowing up a block of tenements and three hundred souls to kill three men who might have betrayed him: he had known they were in the tenements, but did not know which flat. He was a man of remarkable achievement, he was completely unmoral, although in his guise as a respectable

citizen scrupulously honest, but there was one thing and one thing only for which he had a genuine passion, or even real regard.

He loved music.

So few people had known Larramy for more than three or four years of his life that none could say with certainty that he was not likely to have a soul—although most believed it. Yet that queer kink in the man made him worship at the shrine of music, believed by so many to be the one true expression of the soul. He was no mean pianist, and he had held hundreds enthralled by his violin solos; a man who could make the strings and the instrument speak although without words.

Thus Abraham Larramy.

For four years a man had worked for Larramy who actually liked and was loyal to him. There were reasons. Bilson had an urge to crime, and in a small way had satisfied it, but everything Larramy did was the kind of thing Bilson would have liked to have achieved himself. There was something of hero-worship in the attitude of servant to employer, for there was no envy in Bilson: he was prepared to carry out all orders, and glad of any word of praise. Knowing the man thoroughly, Larramy gave that praise occasionally yet not too fully: he knew that if he gave Bilson instructions they would be obeyed to the letter, unless the man were dead.

In a house on the outskirts of Wimbledon Common, a large house fully-staffed with servants and where Larramy was known as Larramy since the name was as good as any other and did not figure on police records, Larramy sat in a study which had been furnished completely by the previous owner of the house, who had died intestate and whose home Larramy had bought as it stood. The previous owner had been a retired solicitor, and the walls of the study were lined with legal tomes. The furniture was heavy and dark, the curtains were of red plush, the oak panelling was dark and to some dreary. To Larramy it seemed 'class'—for he had ambitions, and one of them was to enter the mystic circle of the Upper Ten and certainly it provided a background of the utmost respectability.

The house had been altered a little—just enough. There were rooms in the roof and others in the cellar where things the police would not approve of happened: but the alterations had been carried out by trustworthy workmen, who would never talk of what they had done.

In every way, thought Larramy, it was what he wanted. There were four exits—two known, being the front and rear, two unknown, one leading from the cellar to the end of the back garden—which garden was of some acre-and-a-half—and the other at the side of the house and leading almost directly on to the Common. It was a large house, with some seventeen rooms. It was quiet and secluded, and yet admirably central for operating

in London or the Southern counties. It was only twenty-five minutes from Victoria, for instance, and while Dawlish and Farningham were talking in Chloe's flat, Larramy was sitting at the large, walnut desk in the study, and speaking into the only modern thing in the room—the hand-microphone telephone.

A drab voice was speaking.

"It was inevitable, sir; several others joined him, and we had no choice but to leave at once; the business could not be discussed in those circumstances. The woman, I am afraid, was obstinate, most obstinate."

"You left her there?"

"As I intimated, yes," said Lancelot Grey. "I endeavoured to carry out all of your instructions, but——"

"You fell down on the job," snapped Larramy, and he did not sound pleased. "I'll talk to you later, but look after Cunningham, and make it quickly. How long'll Bilson be?"

And then, as Larramy was glaring at the wall, trying to find words, the door of the study opened. Larramy looked up—and he banged the telephone down without another word and sprang to the side of Luke Bilson. For Bilson was almost as pale as his employer, and his lips were twitching with pain. Over his Harris tweeds was a mackintosh covering the blood-soaked jacket, and he sat down abruptly as Larramy reached him.

"In the shoulder, Boss; I ain't hurt bad. Gimme a drink, will you?" He licked his lips, and Larramy hurried to find the whisky. "Ma Finnigan can dress me up, okay, but I reckon I'll be off duty for a week or so."

"That's—all right," said Larramy. He felt oddly relieved, realizing just how much he had come to rely on his bodyguard. "Quite all right, Bilson, we'll soon have you fit. Let me see it."

He pressed a bell three times, and then took off the mackintosh and, with surprisingly gentle hands, cut away the sleeve of Bilson's coat. He was talking all the time, and Bilson made an effort to answer his questions. Bilson was scrupulously honest in his description of the flight from de Mond Mansion.

"I don't know how many—I saw three, Boss. One older'n you. Grey couldn't help it, he did the right thing. It was the orficer what did it, his gun was like a cannon, and the blasted bullet won't be a small one." Bilson moved his arm and winced, while there was a tap on the door.

"A minute," called Larramy. "Now, Bilson, one more effort. Cunningham was not hurt, nor the others? The woman, for instance?"

"All okay, Boss, only"—he gritted his teeth for he was weak from loss of blood, but he contrived to mutter: "only what's Cunningham's first name?"

"Andrew."

"The orficer called him something diff'rent. Pat, I think. I—

Bilson gasped suddenly, and then his head drooped backwards. He would talk no more for a while, and Larramy raised his voice.

"Come in, hurry!"

The door opened, and a woman entered who might have been sixty or for that matter eighty. She was in black from head to foot, and shiny black beads drooped over her ample, corseted bosom. Her hair was pure white but plentiful, and she wore it piled up on her head; with her majestic figure it should have made her seem stately, but the harridan's face beneath the hair robbed her of that illusion. It was a thin face, with the skin stretched tight across the hooked nose and the high cheek-bones, and her eyes were bright and unwinking, like shiny black berries. Her mouth was thin, little more than an ugly, almost colourless gash, and her pointed chin was pock-marked, as were her cheeks.

She rustled as she walked.

"What is it now?" Her voice was strident.

"Bilson's hurt. Get a bedroom ready for him at once, and tell Sloane there's a bullet to come out—if you can get Sloane sober. Hot water, and——"

"I don't need tellin'," barked Ma Finnigan, and she went out as abruptly as she had entered. Larramy was too used to her to let that worry him. She ruled the staff at Clunes—the name had not been altered since Larramy had taken over—with an iron hand, as well as some of the residents, for six people lived there besides Larramy. She terrified the maids, none of whom was of unblemished reputation, and her accounts were accurate to a farthing. She snarled at Larramy as fearlessly as at a maid, and yet she was invaluable: nothing went wrong inside the house.

She lived in terror of the police, and she had not gone beyond the confines of the walled garden for three years. Three times she had served sentences for illegal operations, and the fourth time her 'patient' had died. There had been a murder charge preferred but never taken to court, for Ma had disappeared: for she had known Bilson and Bilson had brought her to Abraham Larramy.

Now Larramy was too concerned about Bilson and what Bilson had told him. 'Andrew Cunningham', that *was* the name. *Andrew*. Why should he be called 'Pat'? Why had he behaved so differently from what they had been led to expect? Larramy lifted the telephone and called a Mayfair number. He talked, briefly, to a smooth-voiced man who knew his subject.

"Nearly six feet high," said the smooth voice, "dark, with a long——"

"That's enough!" snapped Larramy.

His eyes were foul as he waited for the exchange to disconnect and then put through a call to the St. John's Wood house where Lancelot Grey was staying. As Grey answered Larramy snarled:

"That wasn't Cunningham, you fool, it was someone else.

Get hold of Cunningham right away, understand? Don't fall down this time, get him."

For the second time he rang down without regard for Lancelot Grey's feelings—what time Andy Cunningham had finished a long-drawn-out luncheon and was breathing afresh, for he had told his lovely Betty of the appointment with Chloe, and she had forgiven him. Or at least laughed at him, for she knew her Andy.

She did not know Lancelot Grey just then.

CHAPTER VIII

DAWLISH IS MORTIFIED

DAWLISH was able to appreciate the physical courage of the missing Bilson, but that did nothing to ease his mortification.

"It can't be helped," said Bill philosophically. "You've other things than that to worry about, why not start worrying?"

"It could have been helped," retorted Dawlish; "and Chloe apart it's the loss of the one angle we might have found useful."

"I don't like that 'we'," protested Bill gruffly.

"Backing out?" asked Dawlish gently.

Bill grinned. "Not exactly, old man, I'll see you through. But I'm a bit worried about what Di'll think. I mean, she's had a go at this kind of thing before, and——"

"She should be grateful that such things happen, since one gave her you," said Pat severely. "Di'll be all right, leave her to me."

"Thank you, I can manage Diana." Farningham was almost stiff; he could joke about anything in the world except his engagement, on which subject he was as humourless as a half-wit.

"Is Sister Em coming?"

"She'll be here, or the ambulance will, in twenty minutes."

"Quick work. I'll ring the Shop."

The 'Shop' being the gymnasium aforementioned, and also known to Farningham, there was no need for explanation. The manager greeted Dawlish warmly over the telephone and said that he would be delighted to dispatch two bodyguards.

"Frankie and Ben," he said; "will they do?"

"Couldn't be better. Could they be ironed?"

"Blimey!" said the manager downrightly, "like that, is it? Okay, I'll see to it, Mr. D. Usual insurance and whatnot?"

"Usual insurance," agreed Dawlish, who made private arrangements for anyone from the Shop who risked life and limb when working for him.

What had Chloe done?

There were other questions of importance, and the most urgent was the association of the Greys and the others with drugs.

His feeler on that subject had brought definite results ; there was a tie-up, but too complicated at the moment for him to unravel.

Farningham lit a cigarette, and scowled.

"That reminds me, I haven't had lunch."

"Nor me. We could forage in the larder. At least you can, I want a talk with Andy." He went to the telephone while Bill sought the larder, and telephoned Andy Cunningham's flat. A deep voice, of Andy's general factotum, assured him that Mr. Cunningham was not yet back from lunch.

"Ask him to go to my flat immediately he returns," Dawlish said. "Immediately, Simm, it's important."

"I will see to it, sir."

Dawlish rang the Regal immediately afterwards : Andy and his Betty had left five minutes before, which meant that they might be anywhere in London. Beyond leaving word, at the Cranton, the only other likely port of call, there was nothing Dawlish could do to trace his friend, except——

Call in Trivett.

Dawlish hesitated, scratching his chin, and saw Bill coming from the kitchen with a tray in his hands and on the tray bread, butter, cheese, and ham.

"Best I can do," said Bill gloomily. "What are you looking thoughtful about?"

"Just thoughts," said Dawlish. "Cut some bread, William."

Farningham complained and cut bread with an unpractised hand, while Dawlish telephoned Whitehall 1212. He was keenly aware of the possibility of his real identity becoming known to the Greys, and once that happened Andy himself was in danger ; it was a chance that must not be taken, and he was wondering whether he should have acted earlier. In every way, he admitted to Bill as he waited for Trivett, he had reason to curse himself.

"Why?" asked Trivett at the other end of the line.

"Trying to interfere in other folks' love affairs," said Dawlish blandly. "My Triv, the sleuth is hot on the scent. I'd particularly like a talk with a Mr. Andrew Cunningham, of Broom Street, W.1. A friend of mine, and he's out with his lady. Can you get him for me?"

"Why?" asked Trivett again.

"I'm not yet sure," said Dawlish, and he dropped his bantering tone. "It's serious, Trivett, but I'm not sure just how. Andy should be within three miles of the Regal, and he's running a Mercedes Benz. Even your policemen should be able to pick that up. Yes?"

"All right," said Trivett, but he sounded reluctant. "You're not using our agreement for private purposes, I hope."

"Have some sense, man! If you'll put that call out I'll give you one or two more questions."

"Hold on," said Trivett.

Dawlish complied, took a hunk of bread-and-cheese from arningham, and waited for the inspector's 'carry on'.

"Two gentlemen, reputed brothers, named Grey and looking grey," said Dawlish at last.

"They don't call anything to mind," said Trivett after a pause.

"Hmm. The name Bilson—a clear roughneck type, and with some American experience I shouldn't wonder."

"Dawlish, what have you been doing?"

"Investigating," said Dawlish gently, "all on my little own. I'll tell you about it one day. Meanwhile, about Bilson?"

"It probably isn't his real name," said Trivett. "If you can give me a detailed description, or finger-prints——"

"Finger-prints maybe," said Dawlish. And again he was appalled by his own carelessness. "Triv, there's been a spot of bother at the flat of a friend of mine, not unconnected with this business, or I think not. I've got to hold a watching brief for the time being, but if you'll send a man over for finger-prints it might prove useful."

"But——" began Trivett.

"My game, my rules," said Dawlish.

"Don't carry that too far," retorted Trivett. "What's the address?"

Dawlish gave it, and: "Even a policeman will know that's Chloe Farrimond's flat, but Chloe's not here and doesn't know a thing about it. Strictly hush-hush, Triv, or you'll break a sequence we might find useful. All right?"

"All right," said Trivett reluctantly.

When he finished speaking the inspector rang the fingerprint department, and a man was sent over immediately. The expert missed Chloe, who had been taken to Sister Em's ten minutes before he arrived. Trivett meanwhile asked for and was granted an interview with Sir Archibald Morely.

Morely was not yet forty, young for his job but none the less efficient for that. A strict disciplinarian, his rigid justness made him popular at the Yard, and he failed to make his subordinates feel that he was favouring them by granting interviews and giving opinions: in short he took his job seriously, admitted that he would never make an active C.I.D. man, and yet possessed a quick organizing ability which made him invaluable. He held the strings of the C.I.D. unobtrusively but effectively.

Tall, lean, dark, not handsome and yet distinguished, his sensitive lips curved in a smile when he saw Trivett's expression.

"Sit down, Trivett. Is Dawlish worrying you?"

Trivett smiled. "Sorry I gave myself away like that, sir."

"I've seen the same expression before when he's been active," said Morely dryly. "Awkward customer, Trivett; it's impossible to be sure just what he's doing and thinking. But we can rely on him to mean well."

"He scares me at times," admitted Trivett. "He takes so much in his own hands, and we've rather asked for it this time. He tells me——"

Morely listened without interruption, frowning a little when Trivett finished.

"Ye-es. It doesn't seem possible that he's been working so quickly, but with Dawlish it could be."

"Things come to meet him," said Trivett with feeling. "We spent a month looking for something, and it looks as if he's walked right into it. The thing that worries me, sir, is that Chloe Farrimond has been at the Black Out Club every night for a month or more. She's always with Sir Louis Morrell."

Morely frowned. "Morrell—not too savoury, Trivett."

"No, sir. If one wanted to imagine a man who could be handling the dope, Morrell fits in well. He's suave and oily, and——"

"I know all about him," said Morely. "Does Dawlish know of his association with Miss Farrimond?"

"If he doesn't he soon will," said Trivett.

"Leave things as they are for the time being," said Morely finally; "Dawlish will tell us when there's anything to work on. Between ourselves"—he eyed Trivett with one eyebrow raised above the other, almost sardonically—"we've been three months on this business, and we've got no farther than putting one or two lesser agents away. We *need* quick results, and Dawlish might get them for us. We may have to wink a lot, but you understand that."

"Perfectly, sir," said Trivett.

But he was troubled: and more troubled when, two hours afterwards, he learned that one set of prints found in several places at Chloe Farrimond's flat belonged to a man who had seen Dartmoor and Parkhurst. The photograph of the man, which Dawlish would have recognized as Bilson, was sufficient to tell him that Bilson (then known as Grayson) was the type who might be expected to have a record of robbery with violence. The lowering brows, close and deep-set eyes, and the loose mouth with the prominent teeth, suggested the *apache* type. There was a note on the dossier which said:

Dangerous when in a corner. Known at times to use a gun. Believed entered U.S.A. during spring of 1934. Not heard of since.

Morely and Trivett compared notes over this discovery, but obviously could reach no conclusion beyond the apparent one that Dawlish was getting results of some kind.

"We might say," Morely said with some humour, "that he's moving in the right circles, Trivett."

"Not the one we expected him to move in," said Trivett heavily. "There's one other thing, sir. He wanted to talk with

a Mr. Andrew Cunningham, who was given that message at half-past three, when he was seen in Putney with a lady friend."

Meanwhile Pat Dawlish, Farningham, and Andy Cunningham were in Dawlish's flat. Cunningham looked with melancholy disapproval as he entered.

"You're a friend, perhaps," he said. "You pretend to get me clear of one thing, and then you send a police message out for me. Betty'll think I'm a consort of crooks before you've finished. None of your funny business, Pat, and let me tell you Betty's waiting downstairs. What's the bother? How's Chloe?"

"Sleeping after the shock," said Dawlish amiably. "Andy, how worried did she seem on the 'phone?"

"We-ell—she *pleaded* for a talk," said Cunningham, frowning and looking puzzled. "Last thing she'd normally do. As a matter of fact it's okay with Betty, so I'm seeing Chloe tonight for an hour."

"I don't think so," said Dawlish. "Did she give you a parting present at the end of the engagement?"

"She did, yes."

"What was the present?"

"A pair of silver-backed brushes."

"Which aren't at your flat."

Cunningham's lips opened. "How the devil did you know that?"

"A little bird whispered to me," said Dawlish cheerfully. "Andy, you are in deeper waters than you wot of. Chloe might have been wanting those brushes back, but she might not. At least she wanted to talk about them. Were there any special circumstances at the time?"

"Pat, *are* you batty? What the deuce have those brushes got to do with it? Where's Chloe, and what's she been saying?"

"Special circumstances," repeated Dawlish firmly.

"Of course there weren't. I was a bit surprised—a pair of gloves would have been more the usual thing."

"Never mind that. What happened to the brushes?"

Andy looked embarrassed.

"We-ell—I've about six pairs, you know. Not a great deal of use to me, and I sent 'em to a Sale of Oddments for some War Appeal or other. Between you and me," said Andy hastily and to excuse himself, "after Betty had said the word I cleared out everything I'd ever had from the others—it seemed the thing to do you know, and pushed 'em all off to this sale. About a week ago, or a day or two longer."

"Who was organizing it?" snapped Dawlish, and Cunningham was startled by the expression in his eyes.

"Lady Milhampton, she——"

"When was the sale?"

"Yesterday, I think."

"There's just a chance they've not been sold," said Dawlish,

and he reached for the telephone. "Andy, we've got to have a sober talk, Betty can't freeze downstairs any longer. Slip down for her, the next room's comfortable. Switch the fire on in there, Bill . . . Hallo. Lady Milhampton, please." He had forgotten the others as soon as he heard the voice at the other end of the 'phone. "Tell her Patrick Dawlish wishes to talk to her."

"Very good, sir." Dawlish was known slightly at the Milhampton *ménage*, for Lady Milhampton had a son with whom Dawlish had played much cricket. If the brushes were sold he could probably trace them. He had a march on the Greys.

"Oh, *Patrick!*" Lady Milhampton created the impression of deep enthusiasm. "It's so pleasant to hear you. Only yesterday——"

"Just this once," said Pat, "I haven't much time, but I'll come to tea with you one day soon and you can tell me all about it. Andy Cunningham sent some silver brushes to the sale. Could they be available still?"

"Brushes—Andy? Oh, I remember! I'm afraid not, Patrick, someone bought them. I don't quite know who—oh, but I do! It was Sir Louis Morrell." She emphasized the last syllable of 'Morrell' as if to suggest that it was not quite the thing to discuss the knight whom Morely considered unsavoury: few people liked Sir Louis, although many appreciated his wealth. "I remember he bought several things and paid quite handsomely for them. He——"

"*Dawlish!*"

It was Cunningham's voice from the door, and it blasted across Dawlish's ears so sharply and with such emphasis that Dawlish jerked his head from the microphone. He saw Cunningham standing there with a queer, strained expression on his face, and he snapped:

"I'll ring again, Lady Milhampton, thanks a lot," and he rang down, abruptly, for he could apologize gracefully later, and Cunningham's face proved urgency. "What's the trouble, Andy?"

"Betty's gone."

"Gone where?"

"I—I can't make it out," said Cunningham tensely. "The car's not there, but I know she couldn't drive it. There was a torn handkerchief on the pavement, one of hers. What were you talking about just now?"

Dawlish snapped: "Wait a minute," and he lifted the telephone again for Whitehall 1212. "Inspector Trivett . . . All right, Sergeant Munk will do. . . . Munk, put a call out for Mr. Cunningham's Mercedes again, at once and it's urgent. The driver might be awkward. . . . Don't argue, do it!"

He replaced the receiver, and his face was gaunt as he eyed Andy—while Cunningham looked like a ghost.

CHAPTER X

QUEST FOR BETTY

"SORRY," said Dawlish stiffly. "Andy, there's no time for a lot of talk at the moment, and this might be so much nonsense. She *could* have seen a friend capable of driving the bus and gone to do a spot of shopping."

"Not without telling me, that's certain," said Cunningham flatly. "Pat, I don't like this business. You were talking in a queer way just now, gave me the impression that there was some odd business on foot. What's it about?"

"I don't know, but I do know you and those brushes are wanted badly by gentlemen who won't stand on ceremony," said Dawlish. "They're more anxious about the brushes than you, and they've an idea you're hiding them deliberately. Betty could—I say could—have been taken for a ride to put the wind up you."

The telephone burred out. Dawlish turned towards it, and answered:

"Yes, speaking."

It was the tone of his voice that made the others look round: and could they have heard the dry voice of Mr. Lancelot Grey, Cunningham would have been far more perturbed.

"Oh, Mr. Dawlish—" if it were possible for Grey to chuckle he did so then. "I understand that a strange mistake was made, so foolish of you to run yourself into trouble for other people. I have been very busy since I left you, and—Mr. Cunningham is fond of his *fiancée*, isn't he?"

Dawlish took a grip on himself.

"Meaning what?"

"She looked so cold, my brother has taken her for a ride, and she'll get warmer. We can move very fast, you see, and I hope Cunningham can, too. We are quite prepared to exchange the brushes for the hostage, but it must be quickly."

"Cunningham hasn't got them."

"You can hardly expect me to believe that," said Mr. Grey urbanely. "You bluffed magnificently before, but I want you to understand you cannot do it again—not successfully that is. Oh, Dawlish—we are serious, you know. Lady Betty is a most charming girl. And not, I believe, in the habit of taking—er—stimulants. Such a pity if she began now, wouldn't it?"

Dawlish felt stiff and cold.

"Grey, if——"

"The brushes," said Grey gently. "Otherwise I'm afraid she will learn the delights of cocaine, or perhaps opium. I am *very* serious, Dawlish. Oh, one other thing. I will call for the brushes in three hours, three hours precisely, at seven o'clock. Be *quite* certain to have them."

And the telephone went dead.

"Sorry, old man, the theory fitted. She'll be all right, but they want the brushes for her."

"I haven't got them!" Cunningham's eyes looked wild, his breathing was unsteady. "For God's sake, what does it mean?"

"I know where they are," Dawlish said. "I'll try to get them. Listen"—he repeated the gist of Grey's words, but omitted the reference to drugs, and as he did so he realized that to Cunningham the girl meant everything.

"You and Bill," he said, "will stay here. If I'm not back when Grey arrives, tell him I've gone to try to find them, tell him what happened to them but *don't* give him Lady Milhampton's name. There've been a dozen different sales and it might be any one of them."

"But if he doesn't get the brushes," Cunningham said, "Betty will be in a hell of a mess!"

"Betty's as right as rain until he does get the brushes," snapped Dawlish. "They're far more anxious to get them than to get her. Take things easily, and keep Grey on a piece of string. *Don't* try to break his neck, it won't be healthy for others."

"I suppose you know what you're doing. But—Pat, if anything happens to that girl——"

The telephone rang again.

"*Blast* it!" said Dawlish, and picked up the receiver. "Hallo . . . oh yes, Munk. . . . Right, thanks a lot." He closed down and grinned crookedly at the others. "Our Mr. Grey is careful. The Benz has been stranded in Chelsea; Betty's changed cars."

"Damn it, shouldn't the police be looking for her——"

"No," said Dawlish decisively, "we don't want her found by the police if we can do it ourselves. I'll be back."

He went out quickly, and hurried downstairs. The first and obvious thing to do was to get the brushes back from Morrell, but already something was worrying him. For Morrell and Chloe were reputed to be good friends, their frequent appearances together at the Black Out clinched that fact. Perhaps more than friends—Chloe's reputation would stand it. So:

Had Morrell bought those brushes by accident?

Or because he knew Chloe had given them to Cunningham?

Dawlish pushed the thought aside as he hailed a passing taxi and gave Morrell's Park Lane address, one of the three remaining private houses in Park Lane, and kept in considerable state: his footmen were flunkies and dressed like it, he maintained a household reminiscent of the Regency days, and there was some justification for his claim to be the modern Beau Brummel.

As the cab turned into Piccadilly, Dawlish had a moment's disquiet about Cunningham: the youngster was not acting as he had expected. In fact it was the first time for years that Dawlish had thought of him as a youngster. His *blasé* air, his

sophistication, and his playboy attitude had been wiped away as if they had never existed.

Had he been *surprised*?

In a few minutes he was stepping outside the grey stone porch of Morrell's house. Dawlish had only one thing in his mind—the importance of getting the brushes quickly.

Dawlish frowned as an idea flashed through his mind, but it went immediately, for the door opened and a flunkey stood in the threshold, his supercilious face turned towards the big man. Morrell's uniform was well-known in London: footmen and butlers wore knee breeches, beige stockings, and beige coats, a neat and pleasing effect and not as ostentatious as might have been expected.

Dawlish handed his card.

"The matter is urgent," he said. "Ask Sir Louis at once."

"Sir Louis," said the footman expressionlessly, "is not at home, sir. He is out of town."

Dawlish felt the sharp shock of that statement, and for a moment was too disappointed for words.

"You're sure?" he said; and knew that he had asked for the disdainful gleam in the footman's eyes.

"Quite sure, sir."

"All right, I'll see his secretary; I must get in touch with Sir Louis immediately. Send my card in at once, will you?"

"His secretary, sir, is at the Staines house. You may be more fortunate there, sir."

"Staines?" said Dawlish, and then remembered that Morrell had a large house on the river at Staines, a house which many people believed to be the reverse of respectable. He was less worried about that and Morrell's reputation than at getting in touch with the knight: Staines was less than three-quarters of an hour's run, and with the thinner traffic on the road he might do it more quickly.

"Right; thanks." He smiled again and hurried into the street, being forced to walk for several minutes before finding a stationary cab. He gave the address of his garage, in some mews quite near his flat; remembered that there were eight gallons of petrol in the tank, quite enough to make the return journey. Within ten minutes was at the wheel of a gleaming Lagonda.

He nosed the bus into Piccadilly, reached Hyde Park Corner and hummed more quickly than the law allowed along Bayswater Road. He was approaching Shepherd's Bush when he realized for the first time that he was followed—for Jonathan Grey, in the Austin 12, was on his trail.

And as he faced that fact he wondered whether he *had* been seen at Morrell's.

Dawlish turned left, reaching the old Bath Road on the far side of Hounslow.

And he felt suddenly cold as he realized that Cunningham's Betty was a prisoner of the Greys.

As he entered the long, winding High Street of the riverside town, under the bridge he turned towards the station, the one place where he could be reasonably sure of finding a taxi.

He did : it was an old Buick, a ramshackle monstrosity which seemed worse because of the Lagonda, and its driver was a portly red-faced man who stared with admiration at the bigger car Dawlish hailed him.

"Sir Louis Morrell's place, do you know it?"

"Yes, sir, don't we all?" A beery grin crossed the red face, and Dawlish checked a smile.

"Right; take me there, will you?"

"Oh, *right* you are, sir."

They crossed the river bridge, and then took the sharp left turn on to the Chertsey Road. Once off the main road, however, he was at a loss, and he was glad he had hired the cab; it would have taken him precious minutes to have located Morrell himself.

A high hedge of yew appeared on the left side of a narrow country lane, and then the drive gates of River Lodge, Morrell's so well-known establishment. The cabby swung on to the drive, and pulled up outside the front portals of a small and yet imposing house, some thirty years old. Although only a week-end river haunt for Morrell, the extensive gardens were in superb condition. From the drive Dawlish could see the river, flowing gently past.

Morrell lived on less ceremony here, and a pretty maid opened the door. So pretty that Dawlish smiled widely as he handed in his card, and was ushered into a small but charmingly furnished lounge—a lounge, he would have said, that spoke of a woman's hand, although Morrell was a bachelor.

The door had been closed, but he opened it an inch or two before he lighted a cigarette. The window looked on to lawns and the river, the peacefulness of the scene came to him even more vividly.

But not for long.

It was broken, even blasted, by a scream that came from somewhere above him. A woman's scream, and one of terror, piercing through Dawlish as he swung round towards the door.

And it came again.

CHAPTER X

MURDER MOST FOUL

DAWLISH reached the hall at the same time as a startled manservant who came from the domestic quarters. What the man thought at the sight of the stranger did not concern Dawlish, who reached the stairs first and rushed up them. The cry had not

been repeated a third time, but there was the sound of a girl gasping or sobbing, as though for breath. And then, as he reached the spacious landing, a landing remarkable—as well as the hall—for the comparative lack of furniture, he heard a man's voice.

"What is it, girl? What is it?"

Despite the urgency of the words and the note of anxiety in them, the voice was smooth and oily; although he had never heard Morrell from close hand, Dawlish knew it was Morrell speaking. He saw the man standing in a wide passage from which several doors opened, and crouching against the wall, gasping for breath, was the maid who had admitted Dawlish.

She was beside herself, and there would be no sensible answer from her. But Morrell kept shaking her shoulder, and his voice repeated the question over and over again.

"What is it, girl? What is it?"

Dawlish had an impression of a big man, dressed in black, of dark crinkly hair, and a face so handsome that it seemed too good to be true. That was all, for as he reached them he snapped:

"Supposing you look and see?"

He waited for no permission but stepped into the room nearest the girl—and he stopped on the threshold, his stomach turning. Small wonder the girl had screamed like that. He felt queasy himself, and had to force himself to step farther in, for the floor and one wall were a mass of blood—blood that had come from the man lying crumpled on the beige carpet. The man lay in so odd a position that his face, with the cut throat, was turned upwards: and the cut gaped.

There was a stiff breeze coming in from the open window, and the curtains fluttered. Automatically, and averting his eyes from the body, Dawlish stepped towards the window. He saw the hooks of a rope ladder on the sill and, looking out, saw the ladder swaying against the wall. Also on the sill were patches of blood, as though the murderer had some on his knees and had left traces when he had climbed from the room.

Dawlish heard a slow: "Oh, my God!"

He turned to see Morrell standing in the doorway, one hand clutching his throat, and the other held in front of him as though to ward off the sight of the thing on the floor. Morrell's bold eyes were staring, and his fleshy, sensuous mouth was working.

"Pull yourself together," Dawlish snapped, and in that moment he had forgotten his quest for the silver hair-brushes.

"Who is this, Morrell?"

Morrell seemed unaware that he was looking at a total stranger.

"It's—Jeffery."

"Who's Jeffery?"

"My—secretary. Twenty minutes ago I—no, no, it's too horrible, I could never stand the sight of blood! I——"

Dawlish said quietly:

"Get the girl to her bedroom, give her a little whisky, and put a hot-water bottle at her feet. See that she isn't left alone." He eyed the manservant. "Find the nearest doctor, and get him here quickly," said Dawlish.

"Very good, sir." The voice of authority was as good as an introduction, and the man turned away quickly while the girls half-carried the sobbing maid along the passage. Morrell was leaning against the wall, and Dawlish's voice was strangely gentle, although the sight of a man knocked to pieces in that way normally would have made him contemptuous.

"All right, Morrell, you'll be all right. You'll need a drink."

"My—room," Morrell said in a voice that was scarcely audible. "Over—there." He pointed to the door opposite that where the man was lying dead, and Dawlish opened the door. It went through his mind that Morrell had come out to see what the maid had screamed for but had thought to pull his door behind him. That might or might not be instructive.

The first room had been a study, barely furnished on strictly modern lines. The same decorative and furnishing scheme was in the bedroom Dawlish entered. Everything was on severe lines, it had an almost pristine austerity, so unlike Morrell, who was reputedly flamboyant in all things.

Morrell sat heavily in an upholstered tubular steel chair.

"It's—ghastly. Ghastly!"

Dawlish saw the cabinet likely to hold whisky, pulled out a decanter and two glasses. Morrell gulped the drink down, while Dawlish's eyes fell on the dressing-table, and he saw the beige-coloured enamel of the hair-brushes.

He remembered the purpose of his visit, and even found a smile: for the next few minutes it was likely to seem almost insignificant. He knew that Trivett believed him to have a nose for trouble, but this was pitching into crime too hurriedly.

Could it be connected with the affair of Chloe?

And therefore with drugs?

Morrell regained a tinge of colour, but his eyes were haggard, and his lips still trembled. In his black eyes, normally so bold and confident, there seemed to be appeal. Then suddenly the man stood up, and went to a wall-safe hidden by an etching. He knew the combination and he opened the safe with trembling fingers. He drew out a small box, lifted the lid, took a pinch of a powder inside, and sniffed—as an Edwardian would have sniffed at snuff.

The powder was white.

Morrell turned, half-defiantly.

"I had to have that——"

"Sit down for a minute," Dawlish said, "and you'll feel better. You won't know me, of course—my name's Dawlish."

"Oh," said Morrell, turning his head slowly. As slowly he sat down, crossing his legs. "I am glad to meet you, Mr. Dawlish."

"I ought to apologize for breaking in so abruptly, but I had called to see you, and the scream rather disturbed me. Morrell, I hesitate to take anything in my own hands, but the police must know about this immediately."

Morrell stared.

"The police? About—oh, Jeffery. Of course. I wonder if you would be good enough to telephone them? The Staines people are the nearest. Of course they'll have to know, but Jeffery—why on earth has a thing like this happened?" he asked wonderingly, and his voice was taking on a deeper, confident note: to some people it would have sounded an attractive voice. "It is so incredible and—and such a ghastly death. Poor Jeffery!"

"The police will find that out," said Dawlish. "I'll call them now." He reached for the telephone, on a bedside table, and called the Staines Headquarters, gave brief particulars, and was assured that someone would be sent out immediately. Finished, he looked back at Morrell, who had risen to his feet and was running a well-shaped thumb over his pointed chin.

He was handsome, now.

One might have said magnificent. Despite his black clothes, immaculately cut and fitting his large, fleshy, but not gross body to perfection, he was reminiscent of a figure from the Old Testament. Yet he was only partly Hebrew, and he was known to have a detestation of pure-bred Jews that amounted to a mania: half-breeds were often worse than aliens in hatred of a race. He was not fat, and yet he looked fleshy; and his fine, high forehead, his large black eyes, and the delicate lines of his nose helped to make him seem more like a statue or a picture than a man of flesh and blood. Now that he had recovered and the cocaine was working well, he had a strange motionlessness; and as he stared one eyelid drooped a little lower than the other.

"Yes, of course. You were most efficient with that call, Mr. Dawlish, you gave just the right information. May I know why you called to see me?"

"In a moment," said Dawlish. "Had you any idea that this was coming to Jeffery?"

"Any idea? My dear Mr. Dawlish, that is a remarkable suggestion to make! I trust it was without conscious innuendo." Morrell was suddenly suave and smiling—and, Dawlish instinctively felt, dangerous. Dangerous . . .

It was Sir Louis Morrell's reputation that he always played with fire. Company promoter, director of a dozen important industrial combines, racehorse owner, theatre owner, a modern Beau Brummel and a modern Don Juan, a wit, a man of careless millions, poised, self-confident, capable, with the entry to any house and most families, and yet—not quite *de rigueur*. A man difficult to trust, a man who owed his position to his money. Yet his background was well known, his father and his father

before him had set the foundation stones of Morrell prosperity in Morrell & Son, iron founders. From commerce Sir Louis Morrell had escaped completely—except to garner the proceeds. He was of the social *élite* in a world where the mixing of money and blood was not only tolerated but hoped for; he was eligible; he was sought after by mothers and daughters; he was polite and courteous, even chivalrous, and yet——

Not *quite*.

Dawlish wondered what the police thought of him.

"No-o," said he gently, "there was no innuendo intended, Morrell, it seemed the obvious question. After all, a murder would not be committed for nothing."

"No," said Morrell suavely. "And I cannot imagine that Jeffery carried anything of importance in his pockets"—he spoke of the dead man casually and almost off-handedly, with a coldness that Dawlish disliked: it suggested an utter lack of feeling. "However, the police will doubtless ask me the necessary and *proper* questions, Mr. Dawlish. I am sure that they would not like to feel that anyone had been before them." He smiled slowly. "Perhaps we can now discuss the purpose of your visit. Although before that I must express my gratitude at your presence of mind and"—he glanced towards the safe—"my confidence in your discretion."

Dawlish shrugged.

"Hardly my business, Morrell; some people get drunk, others—well, we needn't go into that. I've come on rather an odd mission. A friend of mine sent some oddments to Lady Milhampton's sale—you'll recall it—and wishes he had not. That is to say, a careless servant enclosed a set of silver brushes which were of considerable sentimental value to him. He made inquiries, and learned that you had bought them."

Morrell stared at him, with that odd trick of lowering one eyelid more than the other.

"I see." His voice was silky. "An understandable mistake, Mr. Dawlish, but tell me why Mr. Cunningham considers it necessary to submit such an inquiry through a third party. And tell me also why he should make so grossly careless a *mistake*"—the 'mistake' was sneered—"over a matter of such sentimental value. That is," added Morrell, "tell me if you can."

And Dawlish, looking at the man evenly, knew that he would not be likely to get the brushes back.

CHAPTER XI

LADY BETTY

At least, thought Dawlish, he could try. But Morrell was no mean antagonist, his use of innuendo had been superb, and he

would not be easily deceived. Frankness was the best course, up to a point. Dawlish said easily :

"I'm glad you've been so blunt, Morrell, it makes it much easier. You know who gave him the brushes, of course."

"Of course." Morrell inclined his head. "Why else should I buy them?"

"Hardly my question to answer," smiled Dawlish. "But you will more readily understand that Andy Cunningham doesn't feel it's quite the thing to chase round after them himself."

"If he wants to get the brushes back," said Morrell sharply, "he can come for them himself. Not—" he recovered and his voice softened, grew slower, "not that I would part with them; my interest in Miss Farrimond is considerable, as you doubtless know. Such charming brushes. I always carry them with me," said Morrell suavely. "That is, I intend to, and I believe they are packed with my case in this room. And now—" he stood up and stepped towards the door. "Much though I dislike it, I must remind you that the police will shortly be here, and I shall be busy with them. If Mr. Cunningham cares to visit me, I would be happy to talk with him. There are several things that I could say with advantage. A drink before you go?"

"I'm not going just yet, Morrell."

"You're not what?" Morrell's red lips tightened.

"No; and don't suggest throwing me out," said Dawlish. "For the time being I have been co-opted by the police to assist them in a little matter that is worrying them somewhat."

"Oh," said Morrell blankly.

"Yes," said Dawlish with apparent enthusiasm; "in a quest for some stolen stuff, Morrell. I've fiddled about on similar things before as you doubtless know."

"How does that concern—Jeffery?"

"It doesn't. It merely gives me right of entry," beamed Dawlish, and he seemed thoroughly satisfied with himself. "It's always interesting to hear questions and even help with them." He seemed inane as he looked at Morrell, but his eyes were not smiling. "For instance, why did you have such a shock when the girl screamed? Why did you keep asking what it was, instead of going to see? Were you a little *afraid* of what might have happened, Morrell?"

The knight's eyelids drooped.

"I—see. Will you be staying if you have the brushes?"

"No, there's no real need, and after all I'm not engaged on *that* particular job."

"You can have the brushes," said Morrell, and for him he spoke roughly. He stepped to the side of the bed, and picked up a pigskin suit-case. He opened the case, and Dawlish noticed his deliberate, careful movements; here was a man who would never be careless, a man instinctively methodical.

He saw Morrell start. He was quite convinced that the start was genuine, as well as the stupefaction in the black eyes.

"They—they're not *here*! They're gone!"

The transition from exhilaration to depression deeper than he liked came swiftly to Dawlish. He hesitated, stepped towards the bed, and saw Morrell lift everything out of the case. There were no brushes.

"When was this packed?" asked Dawlish tensely.

"This—this morning, some time. It's incredible."

"Who packed it?"

And Morrell stared.

"Jeffery—he was the only one to have a key beside myself!"

There was no sign of the brushes in Jeffery's bag or in his study. Morrell telephoned the Park Lane house, sending a servant to look through his rooms there, but the brushes were not in the drawer Morrell would have used for them: nor could they be found anywhere. Morrell seemed off his balance, but as far as Dawlish could see only because it was so incredible a thing. He said so.

"Presumably," said Dawlish, "Jeffery stole the brushes, and Jeffery has been murdered. It could be coincidence, but I don't think so. Morrell, there's no need for the local police to know about this connection, but the Yard will have to eventually."

"I—I suppose so." The knight did not seem perturbed by that.

"Tell them—the locals—that I've been here, and if they're curious advise them to telephone Chief-Inspector Trivett at the Yard."

"I will," said Morrell. "I assure you that I will."

Dawlish left him curiously dissatisfied. There were many things about Morrell which he did not understand, and he was convinced that **the man** could be dangerous. But there was so far no reason to suspect that his interest in the brushes was any deeper than his interest in Chloe.

At all events it would be wise to let him believe that Dawlish's interest had cooled.

But—the brushes.

And Betty.

Dawlish felt sick at heart as he reached the carriage-drive in front of the house. The cabby was sitting at the wheel and smoking, red-faced but curious. He had, it appeared, heard the shouting.

"A maid with hysterics," said Dawlish briefly. "Get me back to my car, please, quickly."

They were out of the drive when a police-car came along, and the cabby glanced over his shoulder at Dawlish, who remained expressionless. The cabby made a mental note to report

to the police if he heard of any trouble at Morrell's house, and deposited his fare at the station. He was pleased with his payment, but he frowned after Dawlish as the latter drove off; and for the first time he saw the bullet-holes in the wings.

"'Strewth!'" gasped the cabby. "'Ere, I'm not sitting on this."

He revved his engine and drove to the police-station, and there told a garbled story to a sergeant more impressed because of the call received from River Lodge. The sergeant told the station superintendent, who had already heard the word 'murder', and he had a general call put out for Dawlish and the Lagonda. Dawlish was gonged later: and thus it was that he returned under duress to Staines, and there gave vent to his feelings in no uncertain manner, when he should have been at Brook Street.

For it meant that he missed the visit by Jonathan's brother. And he felt afraid for Lady Betty.

.

It was not the habit of Lady Betty Lorne to feel afraid for herself. She was twenty-three, she had appearance even though she could not be called beautiful—despite Cunningham's opinion—she had a figure in a thousand, and a superb self-confidence, the better because it was in no way ostentatious. She was ridiculously happy about her engagement, and freely admitted it. Her fascination for Andy was that she so thoroughly enjoyed every minute of living. She could get angry, but she seemed to enjoy even that. She had lived most of her life out of doors; the Somerset home of the Lornes was the brighter because of her: she was, in most folk's opinion, adorable.

When the man approached her as she waited for Andy outside Dawlish's flat, she was smiling to herself through memory of Andy's hardly coherent story of the two luncheon engagements. He was seven years her senior, and yet seemed such a boy. He——

"Excuse me, miss."

The voice was ill-educated, the man who possessed it was not a prepossessing specimen, although he was dressed in chauffeur's uniform. He had unpleasantly thin lips, she saw.

"What is it?" asked Lady Betty.

"Just keep quite still," said a drab voice from behind her, "and you need have no alarm, Lady Betty."

And then she *was* alarmed.

But as she turned she saw the gun in the hand of a man who seemed completely grey; and something in his expression warned her that he would use it. She felt paralysed, she could not have cried out had she wanted to. And the chauffeur took the wheel and drove off smoothly, while the man in grey sat behind her.

After five minutes, and at Victoria, she managed:

"What does this mean?"

"Quiet, please," said the man in grey.

Ebury Bridge—Sloane Square—Chelsea.

They turned into a side street, and stopped outside a small house near the river. Above the roofs of the houses she could see cranes and the masts of a ship. She felt cold, and quite helpless, for the manner of the man in grey was frightening, even when he kept his gun in his pocket with his hand about it.

"Step out here, please," said the man in grey. "You will be quite comfortable, and it will only be for a short time. I hope," he added, and he sniggered again.

She hardly realized that he was gripping her arm, that the door of the house opened, and she was ushered into a narrow passage which served as a hall. She heard masculine voices, and the man who had opened the door was a beetle-browed, uncouth specimen who leered at her.

"Got a peach there, Grey, ain't cha?"

"Be more respectful," chided Lancelot Grey. "Upstairs, my dear Lady Betty—right up to the top; don't be afraid."

The gun was poking into the small of her back, and she was terribly afraid—more than she would be after she had had time to think, and to recover from the shock. That did not happen until she was in a small attic room, a room with only a tiny window which was fitted with thick plateglass. She stepped inside, seeing the old furniture—a brass-knobbed bedstead, a marble-topped wash-stand, an uninviting chair. Mr. Grey did not follow her, but murmured:

"It will only be for an hour or two—if Mr. Cunningham is wise."

And then he closed and locked the door. She waited.

The hands of her wrist-watch pointed to half-past four—five o'clock—six o'clock. She stood up and walked restlessly from wall to wall, but the minutes went by relentlessly, and nothing happened, she heard no sound.

Until, at twenty past seven, she heard Grey's voice: and it was no longer monotonous, but vicious.

"The damned fools! They think I'm bluffing. They *won't* think so when I've finished with her."

And all the fear she had known before came back and was intensified. Against all precedent she was terrified as she stared at the door, seeing the handle turn.

"*When I've finished with her.*"

The words echoed and re-echoed in her mind, even as the door opened and Grey stepped through.

CHAPTER XII

13 LISTER STREET

BILL FARNINGHAM preferred not to work on his own initiative, for he knew something of the weird and wonderful machinations of Pat Dawlish's mind. Ideas and suggestions which seemed crazy had a habit of becoming sane when Dawlish worked them out—and certainly he had been anxious not to go to the police. Yet it appeared to be a choice between a free-for-all with Cunningham and a word with Trivett. After Grey had gone, without the brushes and taking with him an aura of colourless evil that could be so frightening, Andy said abruptly:

"Get the police after Betty."

Reluctantly, and yet admitting that it was the kind of thing he would want to do in the circumstances, Farningham reached for the telephone. It was ten minutes past seven, and Grey had been gone for less than three minutes.

He put the receiver to his ear, and for his pains had a loud ringing which made him jump. He replaced the receiver and the bell rang. A moment later Dawlish's voice came over the wires.

"Developments, Bill?"

"Grey's been and gone, breathing threats against Betty. We'll have to do something, Pat. Andy wants to try the police."

"Do that," said Dawlish. "We haven't a chance in a thousand of finding those brushes in a hurry, so we must get busy in other ways. Try to get Trivett; if not, Morely. Describe Grey, and suggest the Chelsea area for concentrated inquiries; the Benz was stranded there and quite likely our men aren't far away. Discretion's essential; if there's anything on the cards, beg and implore them not to be precipitate. Clear?"

"Just about," said Bill resignedly, and he pushed a hand through his dark thatch. "Where are you?"

"I'm under arrest," said Pat Dawlish with some heat, and banged down. Banging, he turned to the station superintendent who had, quite rightly, ordered his detention, and asked with withering sarcasm whether that gentleman would be so good as to inquire of the Assistant Commissioner, or Chief-Inspector Trivett, into the accuracy of his story.

The superintendent telephoned the Yard, and found the A.C. in. Morely confirmed Dawlish's story, and:

"Give him all the assistance you can, Superintendent."

"Very good, sir, thank you." There was respect in the super's bovine eyes as he regarded Dawlish afresh. "Sorry, sir, but you should carry your credentials with you. Is there any way I can help you?"

"Lend me a police-car and two hearty policemen," said Dawlish: "the car to have a radio."

"They all have," said the superintendent with a touch of malice, and Dawlish grinned.

"All right, Super, and all is forgiven."

He was in the driving-seat of a police Talbot five minutes later, and the radio was on all the time. A sergeant sat next to him, and a C.I.D. officer was just behind him. Neither made comments as Dawlish drove with a speed that seemed nightmarish through the gloom of the blacked-out night. Approaching London the small lights twinkled more frequently, which served merely to increase the dangers of the drive, but Dawlish appeared oblivious to them.

Then suddenly the car swerved, for the radio gave tongue.

"Calling all cars in C2 Division. Wanted man dressed in grey known to have entered house in Lister Street, Chelsea. Close on Lister Street, but await further instructions before entering. Calling all cars . . ."

The man at Dawlish's side had on earphones as well as a microphone, and Dawlish snapped :

"Try to get me Chief-Inspector Trivett . . . yes, Trivett."

He waited for ten seconds, during which time he swung the Talbot into Chiswick High Street, and then his companion said : "The inspector is on the air, sir," and pushed the mike towards Dawlish.

"What number Lister Street?" asked Dawlish, without introducing himself.

Faintly from the loudspeaker came Trivett's voice.

"Thirteen—Dawlish, what is it about?"

"Kidnapping or abduction, please yourself. Lady Betty Lorne is probably at the house : if the police are known to be converging there'll be only her spirit left. I'll be there in ten minutes. Have the place surrounded, will you, and get a pair of silver-backed hair-brushes so that I can pick them up at the end of Lister Street."

"What?" gasped Trivett.

"You heard. Beg, borrow, or steal them, but have them there for me. It's urgent, old man"—Dawlish's voice was quieter and its grimness more effective. "Vital, in fact. Can do?"

"I'll try," said Trivett.

Dawlish took chances at Hammersmith Broadway which set the traffic into a hopeless tangle, but the police-car was recognized and not stopped. Fulham Palace Road—Lilley Road—Walham Green—New King's Road.

"Get directions for Lister Street," said Dawlish.

The operator put out the request, and the word came swiftly. Third turning past Lot's Road, which was known to most people, to the right ; and then the second left ; it was near the river. Dawlish swung his wheel at the third turning right, and the

dim lights of three police-cars showed. He pulled up swiftly, and yet contrived it without a squealing of brakes, and as he jumped out of the car he saw Trivett, a vague figure in the dim light. Trivett held a small package.

"Bless you, my Triv," said Patrick Dawlish. "The brushes might just do the trick. I'm going to Number Thirteen alone, old man. But if you could have two or three men in the street, all armed, and ready for a rush if there's any shooting, fine."

Trivett knew his man too well to ask questions.

"We can get a dozen, they'll never be seen in this gloom."

"Two or three near the house, the others farther away," said Dawlish firmly. "Our gentry might have eyes in the dark." He grinned, but bleakly, and tore the paper off a pair of silver-backed brushes. "Wish me luck, my Triv."

He walked off, and in thirty seconds turned to the iron gate of Number 13. He reached the front door in three strides, and rang loudly at the bell, two short spells, remembering what Farningham had told him of the ringing at Chloe's flat. There was a pause, then the door opened and a faint light showed the silhouette of a short, thickset man.

"Who——"

"Tell Grey I want to see him," said Patrick Dawlish sharply. "And tell him I'm not alone. The name is Dawlish."

The man gaped—but moved back as Dawlish forced his way in, showing his gun. But for the waiting police it would have been suicide—and if as he hoped Grey had no idea of the concentrations of Flying Squad cars, it remained remarkably like suicide. Dawlish waited deliberately in the narrow hallway, while the man went up the stairs. The semi-darkness was irritating but inevitable, for the frosted door-panels were not properly blacked-out. Subconsciously Dawlish realized how the war conditions affected every angle of life, and made crime easier.

And then he heard a girl's voice, raised but tense, in the grip of some emotion but of what kind he could not be sure.

"You're mad, you——"

"We will see about that."

It was Grey's voice, and Dawlish lost something of his own tension, for both Grey and the girl were here. For the first time he moved from the hallway and was half-way up the stairs when he heard Grey snap a question to the man who had opened the front door.

"A cove named Dawlish, Guv', he——"

"*Dawlish!*"

There was enough in the high-pitched word to make Dawlish realize that Lancelot Grey held him in considerable awe—but there was more. Grey was suddenly scared—and he would not have been scared had he had enough men in the house to be sure of tackling Dawlish.

And Dawlish moved.

He reached the second landing and he saw the open door, with the thickset man outlined against a brilliant light, and Grey just visible beyond him. He had moved with the speed and silence which made him seem at times uncanny, and he was within two yards of the room before Grey saw him.

Grey's hand flashed to his shoulder.

"Oh no," said Pat with surprising gentleness, and he fired from the waist, aiming for Grey's thigh. It would have been impossible to miss, and Grey gasped with the sudden pain, fell down with the abruptness of a marionette. The other man swung round—and was unfortunate, for he met Dawlish's clenched fist.

He yelped, and sat down abruptly.

While into fuller sight came Lady Betty Lorne.

She looked pale and yet to Dawlish very lovely; whatever had happened, whatever she had been through, she had not lost her self-control. The one queer thing, Dawlish noticed, was that the sleeve of her blouse—the right sleeve—had been torn away, and on the fore-arm there was a small brown stain.

On the table was a small bottle of iodine, and——

Dawlish saw the hypodermic needle then, and the small capsule near it—a capsule containing one of the more vicious drugs, of that he felt certain. In that moment he felt an almost berserk rage, but at the same time a cold, sickening fear. For Grey had been prepared to carry out his threat.

That seemed more important than the fact that Grey was on the floor, moaning a little, and with blood seeping on to his grey trousers from the wound.

"Who——" began Lady Betty.

"Not just now," said Dawlish gently. "Have you seen any others, apart from these two?"

"Yes, there was one man. A very tall man——"

"Right," said Dawlish. "He might or might not be about, we'll take the chance." Speaking, he bent over the thickset man and with complete indifference to the fellow's gasp of fear, hit him scientifically on the back of the head with the butt of his automatic. Betty stared, wide-eyed. Dawlish felt the unconscious man's pockets and drew forth a Mauser, repeating the trick with Grey, whose gun came from a shoulder-holster. Grey had stopped moaning, and the expression in his slate-grey eyes was a long way from nice.

"I'll be back," said Dawlish. "Get behind me, sweetheart, I—but just a moment."

He knelt down by Grey again, running his hands through the man's pockets, and he found the small leather case containing the phials of ammonia-gas. He grinned, but not with humour.

"Getting forgetful, aren't I? But I'll be back for you."

He moved towards the door, and Betty stepped behind him,

remarkably self-possessed and very capable. He went downstairs cautiously, his gun raised and his ears alert for any sound. He heard none, while the street door was standing wide open.

"We'll be all right now," said Dawlish cheerfully, "and little Andy will be pleased to see you."

And then he stopped.

He saw the thing coming down from the porch—or what seemed to be the porch—and he saw the red glow that followed it. He knew what it was, he knew he had only a split-second in which to act—and he acted. He swung round, threw his arms about the girl and crashed her down beneath him. And as the back of her head met the floor, an explosion came. A sheet of flame and a billow of smoke, and a gust of wind that thrust Dawlish three yards along the floor, dragging Betty with him.

CHAPTER XIII

MEETING OF MEMBERS

For some seconds Dawlish was too dazed to think clearly, was conscious only of the drumming in his ears, broken from time to time by what seemed like thunder. He moved cautiously.

The girl remained motionless, and he believed she was unconscious, although he doubted whether that was because of the explosion, his body had covered her too well. She had banged her head, of course.

Another crash a little behind him suggested the falling of bricks. Unsteadily Dawlish got to his knees, but he found his head reeling, knew that he could not lift Betty by himself. As vaguely he realized that a man had been on the roof, judging the right moment for tossing the bomb—for bomb it had been—almost to a nicety.

Wearily, Dawlish reached his feet. He had to lean against the wall for a moment, and he felt the plaster crumple beneath his elbow. Then for the first time he saw shadowy figures approaching cautiously, and he realized why the police had been so long; they expected opposition.

"Enter, friends," he called, and more loudly: "You there, Trivett?"

Trivett was.

He led three men carefully over the heap of rubble which was all there was left of the porch and front door, while torches revealed the damage inside the hall itself. The door had been lifted clean off its hinges, and was lying across the stairs, smashed and drunken-looking. A litter of glass and broken bricks lined the hallway and the stairs, but most of it had gone over Dawlish's head, and therefore Lady Betty's.

"The—man on the roof?" Dawlish asked slowly.

"We've sent up for him, but it'll be difficult," said Trivett. Lady Betty was outside, and being put into a police-car, while Trivett led Dawlish into the street. Dawlish saw three torches, their beams converging on his head, while the chief-inspector made sure that there was no scalp damage before he gave the big man whisky: Trivett was afraid of concussion, and he wanted Dawlish to talk.

"That's better," said Pat, as the spirit bit at the roof of his mouth and his tongue. "Nearly nice work, my Triv; I'm glad I got here in time. You'll find two gentlemen upstairs, I think, in an attic room. With accessories. Not nice people, Triv. They certainly use drugs."

"So—you're in the middle of it," said Trivett, and although he knew it was true he could hardly believe it.

"I've a nasty feeling that I've only touched the outer fringes, but there are a lot of fringes. How's Betty?"

"Who?"

"Lady Betty Lorne."

"Good God!" gasped Trivett.

"Not nice, blasphemy from a policeman," said Dawlish, and he shook his head. "She's to come with me, her boy friend's at my flat and he'll be anxious."

Trivett said: "I suppose you know what you're talking about. All right, I'll get you away."

"And go through this place with a fine-toothed comb," said Dawlish. "Go through it twice, you'll need to to find anything."

Lady Betty, he was assured, was not likely to be unconscious for long; her only injury was a scratched leg apart from the heavy bump on the back of her head. Dawlish half-dozed as he sat in the back of the car with the girl beside him, yet serious thoughts percolated through.

The outer fringes——

He was unpleasantly aware that he had got no further yet.

The four gentlemen who were at Abraham Larramy's Wimbledon house were equally sure that Dawlish had no more than reached the outer fringes—with one exception, and Larramy did not confide in the others about that. He might be termed the centre of the association which Trivett and Morely had suspected to be in existence but had been unable to find. There were, however, four other centres. The three men with him, and one other who rarely attended what was called a Meeting of Members.

Larramy knew that if he saw one of the other trio in the street he would not recognize them.

They were disguised. Not cleverly, but effectively. The object of their disguise was simply to make sure that their real features could not be recognized, in consequence of which grease-

paint was used too freely, and in two cases beards were too obviously false. They were all in dinner-jackets, but since Larramy had never seen them in other dress and did not know whether the clothes fitted their figures or were padded, that did not help him a great deal. Since all three were plump, he suspected that one or more was padded.

They preferred a soft light, and they made a point of sitting with their backs to it, so that their disguised faces were in shadows, while Larramy's pallid skin and staring eyes were vivid. It was theatrical, Larramy knew, and yet it was so effective that it seemed natural.

Sitting at Larramy's desk, in the one-time solicitor's study, they each smoked cigars, and in front of them were balloon-shaped brandy glasses.

He was not frightened of them, but he was a little anxious on occasions. He did not know, for instance, how they had got in touch with him in the first place, except that it had been through the elder Grey—and on the subject of the Members Lancelot Grey had never been talkative. In all other things the Greys obeyed Larramy without question, but since the Members themselves had suggested that Larramy should not be too curious on that one subject, Larramy did not press the point.

He was making money, hand over fist. Not in hundreds, not even in thousands, but in substantial amounts which at one time would have seemed fantastic. He carried out his operations in whatever way he liked, being entrusted with the prosecution of the various activities mooted by the Members. They did not so much assist as suggest. They were always urbane and friendly.

He did not know their names, and mentally thought of them as One, Two, and Three. One was the man who invariably sat nearest the window, and whose beard and moustache were brown, although his hair was grey. He spoke little.

Two was the man who always sat in the centre of the trio, whose beard and moustache, like his hair, were grey. He spoke more than either of the others, in a pleasant, well-modulated voice which somehow did not ring true.

Three was clean-shaven and black-haired. When he talked it was to criticize anything suggested or done, and while his criticism was often blunt, it was always fair.

They had arrived twenty minutes before in a closed Daimler saloon driven by the clean-shaven man; they had been ushered into Larramy's study by a manservant who knew better than to ask questions, and after the brandy had been put round, Two had asked for the weekly report. Larramy had just finished it, and was waiting for their reaction.

"It does not," said Two at last, "appear to be very satisfactory, Larramy; you have not even found the brushes."

"I——"

"Were those methods to get them justified?" asked Three. He seemed mildly curious, and he was studying his finger-nails.

"The Greys did it," said Larramy, not without malicious satisfaction. "It seemed all right, but they always over-play their hand. It would have been safe enough, though, if Cunningham had been Cunningham."

"An elementary mistake," drawled One.

"I can't agree," said Three quickly. "The man was due to lunch with Miss Farrimond, and that seemed a certain identification. Either Cunningham cried off because of his new engagement, or he was afraid of trouble and went to Dawlish for help. He mustn't keep in the way, of course."

"He's got nine lives," said Larramy, and his voice was no longer studied, there was a coarse note in it. "The smart Alec ditched Kramm; you know what that means."

"Ye-es," said One slowly. "However, it is quite time we began to show the police that we are really in earnest, it will do no serious harm. It will, moreover, keep them guessing. An amazing fact," he added conversationally to Two and Three, "is that when the English police hear of the use of a machine-gun they immediately assume that there is an invasion of American gangsters, and if there is one thing that really harasses Scotland Yard it is systematic gunplay. We can use that fact to advantage. We cannot expect to get through without some setbacks. What matters is the brushes."

"Cunningham hasn't got them, if he had we'd have 'em by now," said Larramy flatly. "Grey 'phoned a while back and said that Cunningham was in a blue funk—and I don't blame him. We took the girl, and that'll stir him up some more. Dawlish'll come after her, of course, and since he's working on his own . . ." Larramy laughed, not pleasantly. "Dawlish will be handled at Chelsea all right, there's no fear of that. I'll have plenty of men working on Cunningham for the brushes, and we'll get 'em before long."

"Now where is Miss Farrimond?" asked Number One.

"At a nursing-home in Bayswater," said Larramy; "she can't talk for twenty-four hours or more."

"I see. Then she can be left. Now of the other matters, Larramy. Are the consignments arriving here without trouble?"

"Quite okay," said Larramy, and he grinned. "It's smart, that, I——"

"We know it is clever and effective," said One testily; "we need not go into that. Distribution?"

"No trouble," said Larramy. "We've three more agents, and they're all sound."

"Excellent. All right, Larramy, keep operating carefully, but if the need arises be quite ruthless. If you will leave us for a while we will send for you when we have finished."

"Right," said Larramy.

He went out with alacrity, but as the door closed he scowled, and stepped swiftly towards the stairs. In thirty seconds he was in a barely furnished bedroom immediately above the study, and he stepped to a small rug lying by the side of the bed. He lifted it, revealing a small microphone beneath a sawn floor-board, and faintly the voices of the trio floated upwards.

"The Whitehall experiments," Number One was saying, "appear to be fairly satisfactory. The police have discovered only two of the seven experimental efforts, which means when it reaches a wider scale we should be sure of at least fifty per cent success. Enough, I think, for our purpose."

"Ye-es." Three hesitated. "We could do with more. Once we start in earnest, of course, it will have to be done quickly."

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Two. "A week will be enough for everything, and then . . ." he laughed lightly. "It should have a salutary effect on Scotland Yard as well as Whitehall. Do you know, I've yet to find a loophole in the organization. Larramy does the rough work very effectively, and Cautald is undoubtedly clever at Whitehall. I——"

The speaker broke off, for the telephone rang sharply. He did not lift it, but pressed a bell on the desk, a summons for Larramy whose main interest was in the name Cautald. He had known that there was another section of the activities of One, Two; Three, and Four—who was often an absentee—and to the tortuous yet opportunist mind of Abraham Larramy it seemed that he would benefit considerably if he knew more about the Whitehall operations. He was impressed by and secretly a little afraid of the Members, but given information which they would find dangerous, he might turn the tables.

That and other thoughts went by the board as he hurried downstairs. When he entered, after tapping, One was holding the telephone. Larramy took it with a nod, and grunted:

"Well?"

"Abe, old Grey's through; Dawlish got the girl. I tried to put him out but it didn't work——"

The breathless voice at the other end of the wire said more, but Larramy hardly heard him. His pallor, if that were possible, had increased, and the direct stare from three pairs of eyes behind tinted lenses did nothing to decrease his perturbation.

"Hold on," he snapped, and then: "Things have gone wrong at Chelsea: Dawlish again. They've got old Grey."

And Larramy was stupefied by the oaths that sprang from the lips of the three men, and the words that Number One barked:

"They mustn't hold Grey alive. I don't care how you do it, but put him away. Find where they take him, blow the place to pieces if you must, but *find Lancelot Grey!*"

CHAPTER XIV

'FIND LANCELOT GREY'

FOR the second time Larramy played an active part in the affair of the silver brushes. The orders were uncompromising, he sensed the vital importance of the task, and he acted in a way that he knew would impress them.

"Hallo, Schuster—where'd they take Grey?"

"He's shot, in the house."

"Where're you?"

"On a 'phone box a hundred yards away."

"Got a car handy?"

"Sure."

"If they take Grey out, see that you follow him, make sure where he goes. If you get a chance to rub him out, do it, and never mind your own skin, we'll look after you. I'm having four of the boys with you pronto, and they'll bring a load of sky-high. Grey's got to fade out, and there's no mebbes. Get to it." He rang down, lifted the receiver again and called a St. John's Wood number. "Aggie?—oke. Four of the boys and a load of sky-high, get them to Chelsea pronto and take orders from Schuster. Don't fall down on it, I'll be around myself." He rang down again, and started for the door. "It's as good as done, don't fret."

The Members had recovered their composure.

Larramy went out, and as he went he nearly banged into the black, rigid figure of Ma Finnigan. Her lips were turned back in a sneer.

"Send Sloane down to the garage in a hurry, heeled."

She seemed to mock at him, but she hurried away, while Larramy reached the garage and took out an Austin 7. By the time the engine was warmed a stout, red-faced man, whose veiny nose and cheeks bespoke the heavy toper, had come from the side entrance of the house. A shapeless Trilby was on the back of his head and his grey mackintosh was unbuttoned. He eyed Larramy owlshly.

Larramy was at the wheel, and as he started off he saw the closed Daimler of the Members turning out of the drive.

Near Lister Street, fifteen minutes later, he slowed down. A match flared ten yards ahead of him, went out, and was replaced by another. In the glare Larramy saw a long, thin man and the outline of a telephone kiosk. He pulled up opposite the man.

"Has he gone?"

"Ambulance just reached the house, Boss."

"The others here?"

"Yeah. I've give them 'the word, they're waiting. As it comes round the corner they'll walk in, I reckon."

"Get a hundred yards up the road and if the ambulance gets through, follow it. Get going," rasped Larramy, and as he spoke he made out the faint outlines of the four men who were sitting in a saloon car.

There was a waiting period that got on his nerves, but a brighter glow than most cars showed came along Lister Street, and beyond it Larramy saw the ambulance. He struck two matches in quick succession. The engine of the closed car hummed, and as the ambulance turned the corner the closed car drove alongside it for perhaps five seconds. There was a pause, and then the closed car shot forward.

"Flatten out," snapped Larramy.

Doc Sloane obeyed, and Larramy went prone on the pavement, while looking towards the ambulance, now no more than a vague shape in the distance. Then suddenly it was flame! A burst that seemed to spread the length and breadth of the thoroughfare, red, lurid, and angry.

Larramy buried his face in his hands.

The gust of wind from the explosion passed over his head, but pieces of debris flew about him, one smashing through the wind-screen of the Austin. But Larramy took a chance, and peered up. He saw the ambulance, or what was left of it, was on its side, and flames were licking across the roadway. Farther down he saw the closed car, on all four wheels.

"Let's get going," said Larramy, and he licked his lips. "I reckon that's put paid to Grey."

Sloane started, and peered through the gloom.

"Which one?"

"The old one."

And the two men rejoined their car, which moved swiftly and unobserved into the darkness of the night, while Trivett with three of his men was hurrying towards the scene of the explosion, more than a little afraid of what had happened.

None of which was known at the time to Patrick Dawlish. He could walk up the stairs of his own volition, and he went ahead of the police who were carrying Lady Betty. He grinned as he opened the door with his key, and saw Bill Farningham staring towards it, with a hand in his pocket. Bill had contrived to get a change of clothes, and was wearing a lounge suit.

"The news is good," said Dawlish deeply. "I—what's the matter with you?"

For Farningham stared—and then began to laugh. In the circumstances it was an odd thing to do, and his humour was not shared by Cunningham, who had been drinking rather too much. The younger man bounded across the room and gripped Dawlish's arm.

"Betty——?"

"Safe, but for bruises," said Dawlish. "She'll be up in a moment, you needn't worry. Mr. Farningham, perhaps you'll ——"

"Oh, my Pat!" gasped Dr. William Farningham, "the sight of you would—— Come," he broke off, and led the way into the bedroom, where he opened a wardrobe which had a full-length mirror.

Dawlish stared.

His trousers had disappeared but for jagged patches about his thighs; he had one sock and two suspenders. His coat was in ribbons, but his collar and tie were hardly touched and looked spotless. His hair was on end, his face and hands begrimed, and one sleeve of his coat hung in three pieces. He continued to stare, and then ruefully he smiled.

"The fireworks did that, Bill. Be a hero and run me a bath, will you, and then ring the restaurant for some food so that we can eat in comfort. I'll look after Betty."

"Better let me go."

"Orders is orders," said Dawlish firmly.

There was some purpose in his speedy movement into the living-room, and it was not unconnected with the noise of foot-falls on the stairs. As Dawlish entered the room he saw Cunningham standing by the door, and beyond him the two policemen carrying Cunningham's seventh—or eighth—fiancée. In profile Cunningham looked pale and exhausted, but to Dawlish it seemed that his eyes were very bright.

"Andy, the spare bedroom."

"Right." Cunningham stepped to Betty, took her from the others masterfully, and carried her into the spare room with more ease than his thin frame suggested he was capable of.

"Could there be a nurse, old man?" he asked Dawlish. "Or a decent maid?"

"I'll have a nurse sent over," said Dawlish; "but she's as right as rain, there's no need to worry about that."

"Your bath is ready, sir," called Farningham jovially.

"Don't forget the food," said Dawlish, "and call on Sister Em again, for a nurse to look after Betty and to put her to bed." Whistling, he considered the two silver-backed brushes which he had taken to Lister Street with the object of negotiating with false goods. It was almost too simple an idea, but he wondered whether he might use it to advantage.

But the urgent problem was the hiding-place of the genuine pieces. Of course Jeffery might have had them, poor beggar, could even have been murdered for them. But the Greys would not look in two places at the same time; they would not have wasted effort with Cunningham had they believed Jeffery knew where they were.

Acc - Sub 2 1061

But why the particularly vile killing? It had been more blood-letting than simple murder. Dawlish looked gaunt and stopped whistling, for he recalled the shambles at the Staines house too vividly. From it his mind turned to contemplation of Sir Louis Morrell: he had not been impressed beyond the fact that Morrell quite obviously had been *afraid* of an attack on Jeffery, and yet had received a shock when he had seen the body.

Then there was Chloe——

He heard the telephone while he was rubbing himself down and with a bath towel about his muscular frame he stepped into the living-room. His arrival coincided with that of the nurse, a dowdy-looking middle-aged woman whose eyes sparkled behind pince-nez at the sight of Dawlish and his bath towel. Dawlish waved and smiled engagingly, sitting down abruptly when the bath towel nearly dropped as he lifted the telephone.

"Dawlish speaking . . . *what!*"

It was then that he heard the story of the death of Lancelot Grey. The crook, the ambulance driver, and two attendants had been blown to perdition in a matter of seconds, and it was easy to understand Trivett's grim voice. The utter ruthlessness of such a killing appalled him; at that time he did not know of the tenements episode which was the darkest deed in the history of Abraham Larramy.

Trivett went on: "We must have your full story now, Dawlish, you've got to keep nothing back. Sir Archibald would like to come over to your flat."

That, thought Dawlish, was a reasonable thing to do: he was feeling, he thought ironically, the effect of a not inconsiderable day, and his head was aching dully. But he was his genial self when the nurse came from the spare room to declare that Lady Betty—she said 'Madame', for she did not know her patient's name—was in bed, respectable, and conscious. Cunningham hurried into the room, and Dawlish allowed him five minutes. Then he tapped with unnecessary vigour before going in.

"And now," he said cheerfully, "we can be introduced."

"I've got to thank you——" began Betty. There was a vivid freshness about her which was apparent despite the ordeal of the afternoon.

"Thank me for nothing," Pat said. "By all the canons of catch-as-catch-can law, I put you into the hole and had to get you out of it."

"But *why* was it?" demanded Betty with good reason.

"Answer me that and you make my reputation," said Dawlish. He patted the back of her hand, in an absurd fatherly fashion. "Betty, it's Mystery with a capital M, and I don't think young Andy knows much about it. The starting-point appears to be the silver-backed brushes he's told you about. Convince

our friends—and I think I can—that Andy hasn't the first idea where to find the brushes, and you'll hear no more about it."

Dawlish eyed a sober-faced Betty.

"She's an understanding soul," said Pat. "Before we feed—you can have a bite in here with Betty—those brushes, old man. Where did Chloe buy them, have you any idea?"

"Not the foggiest," said Cunningham. "I—half a mo', though, there was a name tag on the box, I remember. Those people in the Arcade, Misslethwaite, isn't it? A tongue-twister, anyhow. But does that help?"

"I don't know yet," said Patrick Dawlish. "But I soon will."

Meanwhile he ate, and was at the coffee stage when Morely came in with Trivett. And while Dawlish marshalled his facts, deciding what it was best to leave out without arousing suspicion—by then he was respectably clad again—Larramy reached the Wimbledon house and was able to report success when the first telephone call came from the man he labelled One.

And, in an upper room at the house, Doc Sloane was telling Jonathan Grey that his brother had been liquidated.

He had never seen hate so naked on any man's face.

CHAPTER XV

SIR LOUIS MORRELL IS ANGRY

It was hardly surprising, thought Dawlish, that the Assistant Commissioner should be a little distant: nor was he thawed by a gesture towards the cocktail cabinet. Trivett sat expressionlessly, prepared to make any comment that he thought useful.

"As far as I can see," said Morely after the preliminaries, "you've taken far too much on yourself, Dawlish. When we asked for your co-operation we didn't put you in charge of the Yard."

Dawlish raised one eyebrow.

"Sarcasm on high levels tonight, I see. However, you'd best have the whole story. But first—what time did you come to see me, Trivett?"

"About ten this morning."

"It was five minutes to, precisely," said Dawlish, and he continued to appear amused. "Morely, keep at the back of your mind the fact that what I've got to tell you has happened since ten o'clock. A trifle over eleven hours in fact."

He told the story precisely, clearly, and without embellishments: all he minimized were his own activities. He started with his offer to lunch with Chloe Farrimond, the grey men at the Superb, the fracas at the flat, the arrival of Farningham (he omitted all reference to Colonel Adams, which gentleman he had forgotten until beginning the résumé of the story). He des-

cribed the Greys, Bilson, and the wild-eyed man whose name he did not know, he went easily on to the matter of the kidnapping of Lady Betty, his efforts to regain the brushes, the murder at Morrell's house. He did not make capital out of Morrell's queer reactions, nor the knight's drug-taking; that, he considered, was best left alone for the time being.

He made only kindly comment on the action of the Staines police in detaining him, and he spoke tensely and vividly of the scene at 13 Lister Street, emphasizing the preparations for pumping dope into Lady Betty. He sketched-in the moment when he had seen the fuse of the burning bomb.

He smiled at Morely.

"First obvious thing, Morely, is that these gentry are *not* afraid of consequences—we've met the really ruthless type so many people won't believe in. I heard a man at the Club the other day refusing to believe a Tommy-gun had ever been used in England. Poor, kindly soul."

"I——" began Morely, but Dawlish interrupted.

"The second obvious thing is that no one would go to the lengths these gentry have to get something that was not important. Chloe's parting gift to Andy Cunningham holds the deep and deadly secret"—he spoke flippantly but did not look flippant—"and on those brushes turns the solution to this affair, I fancy. The third obvious thing is that Lancelot Grey knew enough to be dangerous to Pale-face or whoever employs Pale-face; and the fourth obvious factor—probably the most important," went on Dawlish slowly—"is that after some months of insidious work with drugs these people are prepared to come into the open. I don't like the sound of it. Deep-laid plans are most effective when they really get into operation. Agreed?"

Morely frowned and drank deeply.

"You may be right, Dawlish. It's an amazing business. But had you advised Trivett when you first realized what was happening you might have saved a lot of trouble. The Greys might have been apprehended, for instance."

"It could be," admitted Dawlish, "but I've grave doubts. Morely, I wanted the Greys to believe I was after those brushes, I did not want my connection with the police known immediately." It was true that he had kept his knowledge to himself because of the pale-faced man's brief comment about Chloe, but he did not disclose that fact. "Directly Lady Betty was taken it grew even more urgent to find the brushes and try to work an exchange—or a bluff. She *was* in danger, you know," he added casually. "Had there been a normal police raid I don't think Grey would have thought twice about killing her."

Morely looked a trifle disconcerted.

"You may be right. But where does your story lead you?"

"What happened to the man I knocked out at Lister Street?"

Trivett frowned. "He's at Cannon Row. I doubt whether he can give much information—he's suffering from concussion."

"Well," smiled Dawlish, "it leads us to the further obvious fact that one Grey and one roughneck are out of action, and that the mysterious Bilson is not likely to be serviceable for some weeks to come. Not too bad for one day. It leads us also to the fact that those brushes mean something, and Chloe Farrimond *may* be able to help. I don't think so, but——" he shrugged. "I want to talk to her before you people do. She has a will of her own, and if she doesn't want to talk she won't."

"We can leave it for the time being," said Morely evasively. "What was your impression of Morrell?"

"A nasty piece of work. What's yours?"

Morely smiled in spite of himself. "More or less the same. The Staines people are quite sure the Jeffery murder was done from the window. I suppose Morrell——"

"I'd swear on oath that he had the shock of his life," said Dawlish. "We presume that Jeffery knew the importance of the brushes, and was killed after he stole them. *Ergo*—some one knew he had stolen them. Presumptive evidence, I admit, but we haven't much else to go on." Dawlish yawned again, and did not return to the subject. "Did you get much in the way of fingerprints at Chloe's flat?"

Trivett said: "Yours, Captain Farningham's, and those of a man named Grayson—no others. Grayson is your Bilson." He told Dawlish what was known about the criminal record of Mr. Grayson, and Dawlish's eyes narrowed.

"Our man, all right, and he's certainly dangerous, in a corner or out of it. Anyhow, he's carrying a .45 slug somewhere in his shoulder, which should quieten him for a while——"

Dawlish broke off, for the telephone rang. He was sitting where he could stretch his arm for it.

"Hallo, yes . . . oh yes, Millie dear, but . . ." his grimace suggested that he was not pleased by the interruption. "I know I was disgustingly rude, but I had to go away quickly, I . . . *what!*"

Dawlish was no longer inelegant, but sat straight in his chair, his eyes a-gleam.

"What kind of man . . . you're quite sure? . . . and you told him that Sir Louis Morrell . . . Millie, you couldn't help it, I should have warned you. . . . No, not really serious, darling, but I must go now."

For the second time that day he rang down abruptly on Lady Milhampton, and he snapped to Morely:

"The other Grey's been at the Milhampton place, inquiring about the brushes. He knows Morrell bought them, and that's not good for Morrell."

Morely was on his feet in a trice. "He insisted on claiming he had an appointment at the Black Out that he could not miss."

Trivett, get over to the club. I'll telephone for others to go there at once." That Morely knew how dangerous this development might be was proved by his expression, while Dawlish hoisted his large frame out of his chair and glanced at Bill.

"Get on some glad-rags, old man, our day's work's not yet done. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

Morely and Trivett left one after the other. Farningham hurried to his flat—three doors away—and in the spare-room Cunningham sat quietly, without moving, while Lady Betty slept.

And Sir Louis Morrell, at the Black Out Club, was already getting angry.

He had been due to meet Chloe Farrimond for dinner at the Superb, but the Staines police had detained him so long with their questioning that he had arrived late. Chloe had not been there—nor, when he had 'phoned her flat, had there been any answer. At half-past nine the knight left a message with the head waiter of the Superb and repaired to the Black Out, in the hope that Chloe had gone there ahead of him. The table which he had reserved so often during the past six weeks was empty. It was set in a secluded corner of the pretentious Black Out Club. It was one of those mushroom growths which had lasted surprisingly: London's *élite*—or that small section of it which needed night-clubs and bottle-parties—was apparently never tired of constant reminders of the war.

Crammed to capacity most nights, the club was one of the few night haunts where membership was genuinely required to obtain admittance—no five- or ten-pound note could make a magic *open sesame*.

At his table, motionless and with one lid drooping, sat Morrell. Leonardi, the manager, short and sleek and immaculate, made his cat-like way towards the knight, and stopped by the table.

"Your pardon, *M'sieu*, but a man inquires for you."

Morrell stared. "Where?"

"In the foyer, sir."

"I'll see him," said Morrell abruptly. "All right, Leonardi."

He was inwardly seething with rage as he entered the foyer, and it did not ease when a nondescript-looking man dressed in grey approached him.

"Sir Louis, I have word from Miss Farrimond." The voice was colourless and drab, like the man himself, and Morrell paid no heed to the expression in slate-grey eyes—eyes which seemed to reflect hatred, not necessarily of Morrell.

"What is it?" demanded Morrell roughly.

The slate-grey eyes narrowed.

"Sir Louis, I hesitate to tell you, she is in a most difficult

situation ; only at great risk was I able to come to see you. She is anxious to have word with you."

"Where can I find her?"

"At the Regal ; I have my car outside."

"I'll get my coat," said Sir Louis Morrell. He sent for it while the man in grey waited patiently ; donned it, and followed the man in grey outside. He climbed into the tonneau, a chauffeur let in the clutch and they moved away—while as the car disappeared into Shaftesbury Avenue, Trivett arrived from the Regent Street end of the short thoroughfare where the Black Out was situated, and Dawlish and Farningham left Brook Street in the hope of reaching the club in time. They were not.

And Morrell was not driven to the Regal Hotel.

CHAPTER XVI

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

MORRELL, in fact, disappeared completely, as far as Dawlish and the police could trace. It had not been difficult to learn that a little man in grey had called for the knight and that they had driven off together. But no one knew the make or number of the car in which they had gone.

"Only thing we can console ourselves with," said Dawlish gloomily when Trivett 'phoned him of that fact, "is that we acted as fast as we could, old man."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Sleep," said Dawlish promptly. "And if I don't I won't be able to get around much tomorrow. Have you put some men on Sister Em's nursing-home?"

"Yes ; three."

"Good man. I've a brace of hopefuls there, they can come and look after the flat. Cunningham's staying here for the night, and Farningham ; there's safety in numbers. Lady Betty'll be as fit as a fiddle in the morning, I fancy ; she's still sleeping."

"All right. But, Dawlish, don't keep so much under your hat," said Trivett bluntly.

Whereat Dawlish grinned and wished the inspector good night and slipped into bed. Farningham 'phoned the 'Shop' and arranged for Frankie and Ben to remove themselves from Sister Em's—where there had been no trouble—and to decorate Brook Street.

There was nothing to report during the night, and Dawlish was not sorry : the hectic events of the previous day left him more than a little languid and possessed of a thick head. He brightened for breakfast, over which Betty presided, and, as he had expected, she was as fresh and vivacious as she might have been on any day of the year. After a good night's sleep the affair of the previous afternoon was like a bad dream.

Cunningham was correspondingly more cheerful and asked "What's the order of the day, Pat?"

"There is none," said Dawlish amiably. "Look at it evenly old son, and you'll see that we've precisely no place to start from. Until Chloe is able to talk that is. I'll slip over to see her this afternoon. For the rest, Trivett will be doing all the spade work, and we can't do a thing. Except take care." He smiled at Betty.

"What does that mean?" demanded Andy suspiciously.

"Bodyguards," said Dawlish. "Frankie and Ben have gone off to sleep, but two others are due to arrive at any moment. Known as Slim and Monty, I'm told. I'll introduce them to you before you go out, and be warned that they'll be on your heels all day."

Andy put his toast slowly to his plate.

"Oh no, they won't."

"Oh yes, they will. Unless you want another dose of yesterday's treatment of Betty." Dawlish smiled, but his eyes were serious. "Sorry, old man, but we can't take risks. Slim and Monty will be armed, they're capable, and they're trustworthy. What's more, they won't get in the way too much."

Andy started to protest again, but stopped as Betty said:

"Let him handle, it Andy," and frowned a little. "I'll admit, darling, I'll be glad when it's over."

"We'll be all right," Cunningham assured her. And yet she could not repress a feeling that he too was worried.

When they left the flat half an hour afterwards Slim and Monty, large, light-footed, and faithful gentlemen, were on their heels, while Dawlish telephoned the Yard to learn there was no news of Morrell. Descriptions of Bilson—or Grayson—and of the younger Grey were circulated to the police, although Dawlish doubted whether much would result.

But this business was not normal.

With Bill, travelling together on the basis that two were safer than one, he visited Misslethwaites, in the Arcade. Yes, the sale of Miss Farrimond had been recorded—yes, two silver hair-brushes—yes, exact duplicates were in stock—yes, thirty-two pounds ten shillings.

Should they deliver them?

"I'll take them with me, thanks," said Dawlish, and twenty minutes later he was back at the flat, examining the purchase. The brushes were plain, with ridges running round them, and along the ridges Dawlish ran his forefinger; he was not surprised at the sharp *click*! at the middle of the brush, and the surface of the silver back raised.

"Losh!" exclaimed Farningham, "they——"

And then he stopped, and Dawlish stared, for in the cavity there was a small brown-paper package, sealed with red wax.

Slowly Dawlish lifted it out, broke the seals and opened the

paper. He expected what he found—a fine white powder, its appearance showing why cocaine was known so often as 'snow'.

"Now I wonder," said Patrick Dawlish slowly, "why the assistant didn't show us the trick, my William? They couldn't have many little gadgets like that, could they? To be sold to approved customers, or any asking for a specific article, presumably. Thirty-two-ten—a stiff price for this kind of silver, it's little more than a shell. My son, I'm now deeply interested in the firm of Misslethwaites."

"You're not going to tell me you expected *this*," protested Farningham.

"Expected, no. Hoped for, yes." Dawlish shrugged. "And I knew there was something in the original brushes, Pale-face was so anxious to know whether I'd opened them. I wonder what it was, my William? I wonder what our friends put in them before Chloe bought the things? We're going to see Chloe."

They did see her.

The actress was conscious, but looked up at them blankly. The doctor assured them that she had shown no signs of recognizing anyone. She was in a stupor often brought about by drugs; all they could say—and Bill confirmed it—was that she would come round.

"Which leaves us Misslethwaites," said Dawlish as he and Farningham walked along the Bayswater Road. He spoke sharply and quickened his pace towards his Lagonda, while a little way beyond it was an Austin 12.

"Nothing if not consistent," murmured Farningham wittingly.

"Consistent my foot; I thought we were alone but we've been followed. If we were seen at Misslethwaites a warning's gone out already; any other stuff at the shop will be cleared quickly." They were near the station, and he paused by a telephone kiosk. "I'll 'phone Triv now. You take a cab, and when the Austin 12 starts to follow me, you follow it. I don't recognize the driver, but——"

"I do," said Farningham, and he broke a step. "Yesterday's chauffeur, a thin-lipped swab I'd know anywhere. Pat, we're in the thick of it!"

"And how!" said Patrick Dawlish, which was a remark not typical of him but expressed his feelings to a nicety.

CHAPTER XVII

THINGS MOVE

"THERE isn't the slightest doubt in the world," said Dawlish. "I bought the brushes and they were full of snow. Farningham will confirm it, it's not simply a layman's opinion. And I was seen to go there."

"How long ago was this?"

"An hour, and if you leave it more than another thirty minutes they'll get the stuff out before you can find a trace," snapped Dawlish. "Meanwhile I'm going for a car ride. Don't fall down on this, my Triv, or I won't pass on another item if you put me under third degree."

He closed down and hurried to the Lagonda, where Farningham was waiting.

"I'll drop you in Oxford Street, close to a cab rank," said Dawlish, "it will look more natural. Don't pick a respectable cabby, whatever happens."

Farningham grunted, and they drove off—with the Austin 12 close behind them. The shadowing was so blatant that to Dawlish it seemed suspicious, and he wondered if another car was following the Austin. He slowed down to light a cigarette, and the driving-mirror revealed a Morris coupé with a red-faced driver whose battered Trilby hat was pushed to the back of his head.

"He doesn't look the type," Dawlish mused, "but he could have passed had he wanted to. Have your cab behind that Morris, Bill; it'll probably follow the Austin."

He put Farningham off opposite Selfridges, and Farningham appeared to go inside. The Austin and the Morris followed Dawlish in the Lagonda and, at a traffic block, Farningham brought up the rear. Dawlish drove through the side streets to Westminster, where the caravan remained unbroken.

"Two cars," mused Dawlish thoughtfully; "they surely can't be thinking of putting something across me in broad daylight. Or can they?" He drove, still swiftly, towards Victoria and pulled up outside de Mond Mansions. It was then that he thought again of Colonel Adams.

The Austin drove past, pulling into the courtyard of a second block of flats. The Morris followed Dawlish, and the driver climbed out. He was a florid-faced, genial-looking man who showed from his mauve-tinted nose that he was a toper; and his eyes, thought Dawlish, were unpleasantly close together.

He had his mackintosh open and went a pace or two ahead of Dawlish, towards the entrance. On the steps he paused, and Dawlish heard him swear mildly.

"Damn, no matches." He turned, saw Dawlish and smiled widely; his voice was a trifle hoarse but pleasant enough. "Do you happen to have a match? I came out in such a hurry that I forgot mine."

"Yes," said Dawlish, and took out matches while the other opened his cigarette-case, "of course."

What it was that warned Dawlish the latter could not be sure. Everything was so innocent, so above-board, and at first he assumed that his man was merely making sure who he was. The sudden glitter in the little eyes, perhaps, made him move

sharply to one side—at the same moment he heard a soft *zipp!*

A tiny wisp of smoke went up from the cigarette-case.

Dawlish saw alarm flood the other's eyes: the man half-turned and started to run, but Dawlish shot a foot out, sent the man sprawling. As he fell he swore, not mildly, and the cigarette-case clattered to the ground.

Again Dawlish felt a cold, intense rage. It was so simple, almost fool-proof. A cigarette-case fitted so that it could fire a bullet or something as effective, with no sound nor sign of a gun.

As he flashed his right hand to his pocket and pulled out his automatic he spared a glance for the Austin. It was already moving, while Farningham's cab was swinging round in the middle of the road. The Austin made for de Mond Mansions, travelling at speed, and as it drew level with Dawlish he saw the driver take his right hand off the wheel. He saw the two stabs of bluish flame, and he flung himself sideways—but as he did so he realized the shooting was aimed at the man on the ground. In front of his eyes granite chipped from the steps; the man there winced, and Dawlish saw blood on his temple.

Dawlish fired.

He was not using a silencer and the bark of the shot echoed and re-echoed along de Mond Street—a second, a third. He heard the bullets strike the metal body of the Austin but the car went on without stopping. As it swung round a corner there was a squealing of brakes from the cab, and the driver pulled into the kerb—Dawlish could almost imagine what he would have to say to Farningham.

Dawlish leapt for the Lagonda as Farningham jumped down, snapping: "Look after this fellow."

He pulled the self-starter, went over the kerb and, as he jolted across the pavement, stepped harder on the accelerator. He reached the corner and swung round on two wheels, sending a policeman jumping for his life. He saw the tail-end of the Morris swinging into Victoria Street and going left—towards the station.

He would have been on the car's tail but for the post-office van, taking a wide sweep, which entered the turning. It meant a crash unless he stopped—and even stopping did not guarantee he would escape.

He swung the wheel, missed the front of the van by inches, and then braked. The Lagonda leapt into the air, three people passing by shouted in alarm and jumped away. Tight-lipped, Dawlish kept control of the big car, weaving it in and out of the passers-by, sending one man flying but doing no serious damage. Stopped at last, he saw the postman, four pedestrians, and two policemen hurrying towards him, all bellicose: and he sighed.

But there would be no object in abruptness.

"Your licence, please," said the first constable. Dawlish did not know that it was Farningham's acquaintance of the previous day.

"Right, Constable. I'm dreadfully sorry, but I don't think there's any serious harm done." As he spoke he took his wallet out and extracted a card—a card Trivett had brought with him on the previous night. The constable frowned, for he had expected the red of a driving-licence, stared, and then stepped back a pace, his expression comically different.

"Thank you, sir. I'm sorry, but——"

"You're quite right," said Dawlish, and he handed the man his proper card. "If there are any claims for damage or shock or what-not, I'll look after them. I can't stop now."

"Right, sir. Clear away, there, don't crowd round——"

Dawlish heard the roar of disapproval from the quickly-gathered crowd, and agreed that it was justified. But he had to get to Farningham quickly: he was by no means sure that the man he had knocked over had played his last trick—if, in fact, the match-borrower was alive. And as he got clear he heard the Robert say in what might have been a confidential whisper to his colleague, but was more likely for the crowd:

"*Special* service—you know what *that* means, these days."

Dawlish reached de Mond Mansions; and he chuckled.

Farningham was squatting on the steps, with the dilapidated customer from the Morris coupé standing in front of him. Almost playfully Farningham held a gun in his right hand, while four people stood on the pavement, staring as though petrified and certainly afraid to move. Dawlish pulled up, and as he stepped towards the couple he saw a figure move from the porch-way of the mansions.

"What the devil's up *now*?" demanded Colonel Adams.

Farningham did not turn his head.

"More thusness," he said; "it's getting worse. You might bring this cove a spot of whisky, he looks as though he'll fade right out without it. Hallo, Pat. No luck?"

"Luck!" said Dawlish. "There's no such thing. Sorry, Colonel, you seem to live in the centre of it, but you're really safe and sound. Can you offer harbourage for us? A quarter of an hour will do; we'll have our friend at Cannon Row then."

"I——" Adams looked startled. "Oh, well——" his smile returned, and he seemed to derive a boyish excitement out of the incident, his trim, military figure quivered with sudden mirth. "Phyllis'll be delighted; yes, come up!"

Dawlish looked at a man who—he was to learn later—was called Doc Sloane.

"You heard," he said. "Take it very carefully or something might go off. If you'll lead the way, Colonel."

Adams led the way, and the crowd slowly disappeared, while

at Flat Number 2 of de Mond Mansions Sloane hesitated until prodded in the ribs by Dawlish.

Through the open door leading from the hall, Dawlish saw a middle-aged woman. She was as tall as Adams, plump, well-preserved and smartly dressed in a knitted woollen frock. Surprised, she yet contrived a smile.

"Hallo, Bob, what——"

"I'll explain later, my dear. We'll need the lounge for half an hour or so."

Mrs. Adams nodded and smiled, and to her surprise Dawlish flashed a returning smile, with:

"Better today?"

"Better—oh, the cold. But how did you——"

"A memory that works sometimes," said Dawlish. "Your husband confided in me yesterday."

Mrs. Adams seemed startled, which was understandable, and Adams smiled. Farningham still held his gun, but in his pocket. The prisoner had collapsed into an easy-chair, and was staring blankly ahead of him. Not a prepossessing specimen, Dawlish decided; his lips were loose and slobbery, while they trembled a little, and his hands were shaking.

"A dram of whisky would be an idea," he said, "while I use the telephone—if I may."

"Of course." Adams poured out whisky, and handed a glass to Sloane, who grabbed it quickly and did not ask for it to be diluted. He put the glass on his lap and continued to stare, continued to tremble, while Dawlish 'phoned the Yard. Trivett was out, but Morely was available, and Dawlish explained briefly.

"I'll send for him at once," promised Morely. "Thanks."

"Thank you," said Dawlish.

He turned, to see Farningham swilling his glass round thoughtfully, Adams standing somewhat at a loss, and the prisoner sitting like a statue: he had not spoken a word since he had missed Dawlish with the trick-gun, which had not yet been examined; Dawlish had it in his pocket.

Doc Sloane looked all-in: and, Dawlish thought, afraid.

Without admitting it he was apprehensive. There would be no quarter; there *was* no quarter. Had the chauffeur had his way this man would be dead.

To prevent him from talking——

Just as the older Grey had died.

But *could* this fellow talk?

Dawlish stepped towards him, and the close-set eyes of Doc Sloane stared up at him furtively. Dawlish heard his sharp intake of breath and knew how frightened he was. But as he stared he saw something else. The nostrils of the bulbous, purpled nose were pale and they twitched a lot; there were no surer signs of the snow-taker who sniffed his poison.

Sloane needed a shot of cocaine just then—as Morrell had needed one earlier.

Sloane, therefore, was close to breaking-point.

"I'll chance it," Dawlish said aloud, and he swung round on Colonel Adams. "Change of plan, old man, sorry. I'm going to take this gentleman next door." He smiled bleakly, and moved his gun towards the prisoner. "Up, and look snappy!"

Sloane licked his lips, stared at the gun, and stood up slowly. He tried to speak, but no words would come.

It was not going to be easy to get into the flat, Dawlish saw, and he wondered whether he would have time before the police arrived from the Yard. He had taken a skeleton-key from his pocket and was starting to probe at the lock when Farningham exclaimed—and on his cry there came a dull thud. Dawlish swung round.

To find that the prisoner had crumpled to the floor, was lying there with his lips wide open and his eyes staring.

He died within three minutes and before the police arrived.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW DID HE DIE?

APART from those few minutes while his breathing became shorter and more laboured, and his eyes stared as though he was already dead, the man gave no sign of pain or suffering. It was Farningham who confirmed that he was dead, and the medico stepped back from the body, his face gaunt.

"Heaven knows what it was," he said. "Poison, of course."

Dawlish said softly: "But how did he get it?"

"Probably killed himself. I wondered what was the matter with him; he looked as if he was too scared to breathe. Pat, there isn't a way in which this business could be worse."

"I know," said Dawlish, and repeated: "I know. Well, we'd better leave him here, we won't load the Adamses with corpses. Nice woman, that." He brushed his hand over his forehead. "Right back where we started from; we keep getting there. I wonder how the fun's proceeding at Misslethwaites?"

"You'll learn. Have you put a call out for the Austin?"

"No use; he'll either strand it or change the number, these gentlemen have everything."

A police-car drew up outside de Mond Mansions. Among the three men who stepped from the car was a short-looking, burly, belligerent gentleman, by name Munk. Munk was Trivett's regular *aide*, a sergeant who had been transferred—at the time of Dawlish's first affair—from Guildford to Scotland Yard. Dawlish knew him as a friend as well as a subordinate of Trivett's, and also that Trivett could do no wrong in Sergeant Munk's eyes.

Dawlish went to meet him.

"Quick work, Sergeant. I'm glad you've arrived. You're in time to take him to the morgue."

Munk glared. A spiky moustache, well-waxed, and baleful blue eyes were the chief characteristics of his florid face, which was square and chunky.

"No joking, if you please."

"Plain, sober fact," said Dawlish, and he had some trouble in convincing Munk of the manner of the prisoner's death. He could not blame the sergeant for being sceptical, although Munk irritated him beyond measure.

There was no time for talking, that was the trouble.

Munk wanted everything in apple-pie order, requesting full details from start to finish. But to Dawlish the murder of the prisoner seemed no more than further proof of the ruthlessness of the organization he was opposing; in itself it meant little. He even made the pointed moustache quiver in a smile before Munk had finished, and with that evidence of better humour he said with emphasis:

"And now, Munk, I've got to leave it to you. Get hold of the local beat-policemen, they'll give you part of the story, and if you should find that Austin you'll be famous overnight. For the moment I must get to Inspector Trivett."

"He left while I was out," said Munk. "I don't know where he is."

"I do," said Dawlish. "Let's get going, Bill."

Munk raised no further objections, and was left to superintend the removal of the body to the Cannon Row morgue—Cannon Row was in a different police division from de Mond Street, but the nearer the Yard the better it would be. Dawlish had advised that a pathologist conduct a *post mortem* immediately, and at the wheel of the Lagonda drove quickly towards Piccadilly.

Nearing the Arcade there was a traffic block of considerable proportions, a fact which did not surprise Dawlish immediately. No traffic was flowing in the opposite direction, but what was more unusual was the absence of pedestrians from the Circus end of Piccadilly.

"Odd," Pat said.

He heard the sound then.

There was little doubt of what it was, despite the humming of car-engines about him. There was a burst that lasted for ten or twenty seconds. *Tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap.*

"My God!" Dawlish exclaimed. "Machine-guns. Bill, let's get out of this block somehow."

There was a sudden hum of voices, raised in alarm or fear, he could not be sure which. As he squeezed his way between the waiting cars, a policeman approached him, severe of aspect,

"Can't leave your car there, sir."

"I can and am doing," said Dawlish testily, and showed his identity card. It worked as it had done with the first policeman, for it was signed by Sir Archibald Morely, whose word in the Metropolitan force was law, and more than law.

"Sorry, sir. Rather a mess up there."

"What kind and where?"

"In the Arcade, sir; I haven't been near enough to tell which shop. Thirty or forty of our fellows are there, sir, and I've heard they're rushing a company of the Regulars over from the Park."

As they drew nearer to the Arcade the going was more difficult.

"Ah. Constable—" Dawlish shouldered his way towards a policeman towering above the crowd, a crowd comprising men, women, and here and there children. A set, worried face looked into his, and Dawlish showed the card.

"Yes, sir?"

"Get me through to the Arcade in a hurry, will you?"

"I'll do my best, sir. Move aside there, make way there——" the man bored into the crowd as in the manner born, squeezing through gaps which did not appear to offer any chance of passage. Dawlish and Farningham followed, making surprisingly good progress. There were a few curses, but little serious criticism, while the Arcade drew nearer, and:

Tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap!

It was much louder now, and there remained not the slightest doubt that machine-guns were in use. Or one machine-gun. Dawlish knew what it was, told himself now that he should have expected it. He thanked the Fates that he had been grimly serious when talking with Trivett.

Ahead of him he saw a dozen steel-helmets, with here and there a policeman. Closer, he saw that there were members of the Auxiliary Fire Service making a cordon against which the crowd was surging. His constable reached the cordon, and way was made for them close to the entrance to the Arcade.

Behind packing-cases and two cars, were a dozen policemen, three at least of them with guns. Others crowded in shop doorways, with several plain-clothes men all looking along the Arcade. Dawlish recognized the Assistant Commissioner and a Superintendent named Wrigley, a large, impassive man as fair-haired as any Saxon.

As Dawlish made towards the A.C. there was another burst of shooting, bullets struck against the tops of the cars. The police returned fire, but Dawlish was filled with a sickening realization that much murder could be done, and might be, before this affray was over. There were men of the Pale-face organization here, of course, men prepared to die shooting if need be. At Misslethwaites, the most reputable firm of gold and silversmiths in London!

"Morely——"

The A.C. turned, and his set face lightened for a fraction of a second, a not unpleasing fact. He stopped in the middle of a sentence to Wrigley.

"I'm glad you've made it, Dawlish."

"How long?"

"Twenty minutes or so." Morely rubbed his chin, and seemed as though he had something to say but was reluctant to say it. "Several of our men got through, but directly they inquired about the brushes this started. Two were shot at the shop itself, and if Trivett hadn't brought a strong force with him the men would have made their escape. As it is"—Morely shrugged—"they're not going to be taken alive."

"Which at least means we're moving. Where's Trivett?"

Morely said slowly:

"In there. Alive or dead I don't know, Dawlish. He was one of the first in, of course, and the only man who got out said that he was alive the last he saw of him."

And Dawlish realized that Chief-Inspector Trivett stood little chance of getting out alive, if he were not already dead.

CHAPTER XIX

STATE OF SIEGE

THERE was, Dawlish realized, no use at all in blathering about having to get in. From the porchway where he was standing he could see the barricade, hastily erected and yet obviously ready for such an emergency, which had been put across the doorway of Misslethwaites. Through it he could see the muzzle of one Tommy-gun, and he would not have been surprised had there been others. He scowled suddenly, for he caught a glimpse of a man inside the open doorway of the shop, a man unrecognizable for he was wearing a gas-mask—the military type, not civilian.

"Yes," said Morely, "they're prepared for anything short of being blown to pieces, and we can't do that. We might starve them out soon, it depends how well they're prepared. We'll use the fire-hoses, but I doubt whether it will be effective. They mean to stay."

Dawlish stared: "You're resigned to it?"

"I can't be anything else," snapped Morely. "They've a dozen assistants inside, genuine men who know nothing about the drugs, that's reasonably certain. There are offices above, all filled with people. They've taken command of the entire building. The roof is guarded with machine-guns, and so are the upstairs windows. I've checked everything up and there's only one conclusion possible—they're prepared for a long stay."

"But in the long run——"

"Yes, I know," said Morely testily, and he looked as if he were disappointed in Patrick Dawlish. "We'll get them in the long run all right, although we don't know how and we don't know what's going to happen meanwhile. We *can't* use anything heavier than machine-guns against them, for fear of killing others; and gas will be useless. It's fantastic."

Dawlish rubbed his hand over his fair head.

"Happening. It can happen, of course. So many things can when we see them in front of us. And Trivett's in there."

"He is."

"Bad," said Dawlish. "Damned bad. What makes it worth it? Why stage this kind of a Sidney Street stunt in Piccadilly?"

Sir Archibald Morely turned away abruptly. "You're quite sure nothing's been overlooked, Wrigley?"

"Every point has been tested, sir; there's no way of getting into that building without meeting a barrage of machine-gun fire."

"Aeroplanes," said Dawlish, apologetically.

"I'd thought of them," said Morely, "but we can only drop gas or small bombs that way, we'll only hurt others."

"Non-combatants," said Dawlish. "Very thorough people, these friends of ours. All the same, Morely, I think I might get in. With luck, that is."

Morely stared: "What crazy notion have you got now?"

"Those things you damned," said Dawlish slowly. "The brushes. There's a set in my car which looked suspiciously like the real ones, I gather, and the leader of the gentry in there might be prepared to take risks to get his hands on them. The car's half-way down Piccadilly, Lagonda, black, XC123X. If you could have them brought here I'd be glad."

"What are they in?"

"A cardboard box."

"Send two men for the box, Wrigley," Morely said, and from that Dawlish knew that the A.C. was prepared to try anything. "I don't think there's a great deal of chance, Dawlish."

"No-o," said Dawlish, and he seemed better than he had been all day. His eyes were clearer, and his lips were smiling—which was typical of Pat Dawlish. "But while we've the brushes we've hope. I wonder if anyone else could be in there?"

"Meaning?"

"Well, Morrell. He disappeared, you know. And Paleface. It *could* be the headquarters, when all's said and done. Why so sure that there are non-combatants in the shop, old man? They could all be in the swim, you know."

"I don't think they are," said Morely. "There are twenty-one assistants in the showrooms, and a clerical staff of eleven upstairs, on the first floor."

"Goodly numbers, yes. They're quiet."

On his words came a further burst of machine-gun shooting,

and granite was chipped out of a pillar close to his waist. The burst of shooting lasted longer than any of the others, and in the middle of it Dawlish said:

"Could there be a gas-mask?"

"You ought to have yours."

"I haven't," said Dawlish, "that's also in the car. They're prepared against gas, and your men aren't wearing the masks."

"If you're suggesting——"

"I'm not suggesting, I'm telling you that we'll have a gas attack, and quickly," said Dawlish, and he spoke sharply, tensely. "They're going to try to make a break. I—for God's sake, man, clear the neighbourhood. There'll be hell to pay if you don't."

Morely said slowly, "I've given instructions, but we've been working on the assumption that they're prepared to hold out for a while."

"I wish I thought so," said Dawlish. "Damn it, what purpose can they have in just holding out? None, Morely, none at all." He rubbed his large chin thoughtfully, and he saw the doubt in Morely's eyes. "I hope the brushes'll be here in time to hold things up, but I wouldn't be surprised if they're not. Anyhow, gas-masks."

"The A.F.S. people have some spares, I think." Morely beckoned a sergeant who was sheltering near by, gave him instructions and sent him off. Dawlish waited until the masks were obtained, and then deliberately put on his own. Farningham did likewise. Dawlish's voice was muffled but clear.

"Morely—I've warned you."

"Ye-es. I——"

The first intimation they had was when a policeman behind the car nearest to the shop threw up his hands and collapsed: there had been no shooting at that moment, and no sound. As Morely stared a second man did the same, and Morely shouted:

"Gas! Gas!"

The officials near by rushed for their masks, but a dozen had fallen before the precaution was taken, while the wave of gas went beyond the police and the barricades: people began to scream, a stampede started in that section of Piccadilly opposite the Arcade. It had been crammed with sightseers with hardly room to move, and now they tried to adjust their respirators, while the waves of gas swept on towards them, insidious, unstoppable. The screaming was like bedlam, and for those few minutes there was no one to stop the panic, for the police were caught as swiftly as the people.

Morely and the little party with him were lucky; the gas avoided their porchway until they were masked. Dawlish could not see Morely's features but he could imagine his feelings—he must be living in hell.

The worse because he could have avoided it.

Yet no one, normally, would have expected this. Only Dawlish's cold logic, with no wishful thinking, had seen the only way in which the men inside Misslethwaites could possibly get free. By creating panic—and then joining the crowd.

Morely went towards Piccadilly, heedless of possible bullets from the show-rooms, thinking only of trying to take command. Farningham stepped in his wake, but Dawlish's hand closed about his friend's arm.

"Wait," he said.

The tension in his voice was not wholly because of the distorting effect of the gas-mask, and Farningham felt a chill shiver run up and down his spine. Dawlish looked grotesque as he stared towards the barricade, but obviously he was waiting for something, perhaps some new horror.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

"No use," Dawlish said, and within him his heart was like stone. "Get ready to fall, Bill."

"But——"

"Fall!" cried Dawlish, and he flung himself downwards.

Farningham did the same, and was in time—but few were able to avoid the blasts of the explosions that followed. Four separate bombs were hurled from Misslethwaites towards the police barricade; four flashes of flame, four explosions in quick succession, echoing in a continuous roar. The screaming died away, deadened by the repercussions; one of the police-cars seemed to break into a thousand pieces, and each piece flew towards the crowd. Something thudded above Dawlish's head; there was a crash as it hit the door behind him. A window went in, bricks and mortar crumbled——

And then the rush started from the show-rooms.

Dawlish was still on his stomach when the first of the men came through, but he was in time to see them reach the crowd. All masked, all of them armed, they were moving swiftly under cover of a barrage of machine-gun fire from the shop itself.

A dozen men——

Two dozen, three——

Dawlish did not use his gun. The moment there was shooting he would draw the machine-gun fire towards him and Farningham: it was only another way of committing suicide. He knew there was nothing at all that he could do, knew that the men would get away. Had he been sure which were the most important he might have taken the risk.

Farningham was muttering inside his mask, the words incoherent. Dawlish felt like ice as the last of the men left the shop. It had all been done so quickly and efficiently that less than two minutes had passed, and the first men were already mingling with police and people, could not be distinguished from others of the crowd. They were free, they would get clear away.

Dawlish saw no one who might have been the pale-faced man of Chloe's flat, no one who might have been Sir Louis Morrell. If there was anything of interest in the men who left the shop, it was that few of them were tall.

The noise of the crowd, farther away, seemed of little importance now. Morely might have gone in the explosions, dozens certainly had; he could see the battered, broken bodies of some of the victims, and he felt sick. It was a shambles, and it could have been avoided—and yet Morely had done what most men would have done.

No one to blame——

He stopped thinking, and touched Farningham's arm. Together they went towards Misslethwaites; there was no opposition as they went through the gap in the barricade. The shop was dark inside, but several figures lay on the floor, all motionless.

Trivett?

Dawlish reached the first man and knelt down. He did not recognize him, but he knew that he was dead. The second——

And then Dawlish jerked up, startled beyond speech. For the pale face that he saw was that of Andy Cunningham!

He seemed to see Lady Betty, and for her he felt afraid.

CHAPTER XX

WHERE DID THEY GO?

AFTER the first moment of surprise Dawlish pushed all thought of questions and answers from his mind, but lifted Cunningham easily from the floor, resting him in a near-by chair. There was no gas in the sale-room as far as he knew, and in any case Andy would have had his fill of it had there been any inside Misslethwaites.

Andy was breathing.

His pulse, although fluttery, was clear enough and Dawlish did not call Farningham, who was on his knees beside another man stretched flat on the floor. As Dawlish approached he recognized Trivett's drawn face—and he rapped a question.

"Is he dead?"

"He'll be all right," said Farningham. "It's a knock-out gas, but it doesn't seem to be doing any damage beyond that."

"Obviously the use of humanitarian methods," said Dawlish ironically, more relieved than he realized by the safety of Trivett.

"Did Andy tell you he was coming here?"

"Andy?"

"Did he?"

"Good lord, no! I thought he was going to run round the shops with Betty. Pat, he's not——"

"Not any worse than Trivett," said Dawlish. "I'm liking

this less and less, Bill. I'd-have said today that where you found Andy you'd find his lady. No woman left the shop, that's reasonably certain, and if it's true we might find her here. If it isn't——"

He broke off, for the next man he saw was dead, shot through the head. Dawlish recognized his face, that of a C.I.D. man, and he knew that murder had been done inside the sale-rooms as well as outside. Moving heavily and yet with a deliberate speed, he and Farningham brought the seven living men they found in Misslethwaites to the front sale-room. What was more informative was the fact that filing-cabinets and desks had been opened, and as far as Dawlish could see most of their contents had been removed. It was another lesson in the thoroughness of the organization he was opposing. As he worked he felt a nagging anxiety at the back of his mind for Lady Betty Lorne. The more he tried to force it away the more insistent a picture of her refreshing vivacity intruded on his mind.

The breakfast-table seemed ages away.

The affair at de Mond Mansions might not have happened for all he thought of it.

That this business could have started because he had bought a set of hair-brushes seemed absurd—and it was certainly absurd that he should blame himself for the disaster. He did, nevertheless. Had he only dreamt of the importance of Misslethwaites to the organization, it could have been avoided.

A shadow darkened the shop doorway. Dawlish glanced round—and he saw Morely, huddled in a mackintosh several sizes too large for him, with his face streaked with grime, and his right hand held upwards: the two middle fingers were badly lacerated.

But at least Morely was alive.

"What have you found?" he asked in a dead voice that worried Dawlish more than the injured fingers. "Anything?"

"Nothing much," said Dawlish. "What's it like outside?"

"It's—unbearable." Morely pushed his left hand across his forehead, and then straightened his hair automatically.

"Two or three dozen men and women are—oh, my God!"

"Easy," said Dawlish, as from his hip pocket he took a flask.

"Have a spot, old man, and then Bill will repair those fingers."

Farningham spoke brusquely.

"We'll soon put that right, Morely—rest your arm along the side of that case." The case was a long one of glass, and inside were a dozen pieces of silver, exquisitely worked.

A glance at his watch showed Dawlish that it had turned half-past two; he had been inside the sale-rooms for over an hour. Time did not seem to count. He stepped into Piccadilly, and there he saw squads of A.F.S. men and A.R.P. wardens, lifting injured men and women into ambulances. On the pavement

were motionless bodies laid out, not yet covered with sheets. Three groups of men were carrying stretchers, also to the pavement. A lane had been cleared along the centre of the roadway, and other ambulances were coming to the scene of the disaster.

The crowd had kept back, and except for stranded cars and the victims of the stampede, only official workers were in the immediate vicinity. As he stood contemplating the horror of a scene that might have been on any battlefield, a Rolls limousine was driven into the cleared area, and he saw the Home Secretary and the Minister for Home Defence step out. Both men stopped short when they saw the devastation, and for the first time a smile curved Dawlish's lips.

It would not be long, he believed, before he saw them again. But he hoped to find Betty first.

Lady Betty Lorne was not at her hotel, nor at Dawlish's flat, nor at Cunningham's. She appeared to have disappeared with even less trace than on the first occasion, and to Dawlish it seemed a fortunate thing that Cunningham was still dazed by the effects of the gas—a gas which had not yet been identified.

It was an incoherent story that he told.

He had been with Betty to one or two shops, and on the way discussed the brushes. An idea, he had thought, would be to buy a set exactly the same as those he had given away. Betty had disagreed, but Andy had been obstinate: Betty, consequently, had gone to another shop in the Arcade—without specifying which—while Andy had gone for the brushes. He had not been inside for more than a minute when Trivett had entered; and the next thing he knew he had been struck from behind, and had remained conscious only long enough to know that a gas-pistol had been used, with the gas forcing its way into his nostrils. He believed Trivett had been treated similarly.

He looked at Dawlish dully.

"Sorry, old man," he mumbled. "Shouldn't have, of course, but I was damned anxious. I—you'll find Betty, won't you?" For the first time he showed some kind of animation, and Dawlish responded far more cheerfully than he felt.

"Lord, yes, it's as good as done! I'll get on the go at once."

"Where am I?"

"Still in Piccadilly; they've used some empty premises for a field-station." Dawlish smiled, glanced at a nurse who was with Cunningham and three others—the other three unconscious—and went out. Farningham was in the hallway outside the room, and as Dawlish joined him Det.-Sergeant Munk came in from Piccadilly—a dejected, shocked-looking Munk, whose pointed moustaches drooped.

"Well, Munk," said Dawlish. "Messages?"

"Yes—yes, sir. Sir Archibald's compliments, and will you please go to his office at once? I've got a car outside," added Munk, as if casually. "I'll give you a lift."

"Why not admit you came for me?" Dawlish said.

"What if I did—gorblimey, Mr. Dawlish, how the 'ell *can* you grin like that now?"

"Will crying help?" asked Dawlish quietly.

"I—sorry, sir." Munk's suspicions of Dawlish and his distrust of anyone who did not work strictly to regulations were always liable to temporary amendment—there had been a time when Munk had thrown regulations to the wind, and with Dawlish saved a particularly nasty situation. Perhaps memory of that returned. "'Ell of a game, isn't it? The inspector's come round, thank God."

"I'll echo that," said Dawlish soberly. "Do you want Mr. Farningham?"

"Ain't 'ad no instructions, sir." Munk remained quiet and unlike his usual self.

"Right. Bill, slip along to the flat, collect another gun—you know where they are—and then visit Chloe. Tell Sister Em it's positively a matter of life and death that she should speak before long, and make sure you see Chloe herself, get an idea of what she's like, it's just possible she's foxing. Then ring the 'Shop' and tell them that Slim and Monty are the lousiest couple of blackguards I've ever heard of; they were supposed to follow Andy and Betty, but they've simply disappeared."

Bill shrugged. "In that shindy, can you blame them?"

Dawlish grinned. "Read between the lines," he said. "They may have reported to the 'Shop', they might even have news of some kind, and certainly they should know what place Betty went to. If they're still alive, of course," he added gruffly, for it was possible that Andy's fiancée had been in the stampede, and he was almost frightened to look at the motionless bodies on the pavement.

Munk did not give him an opportunity.

Farningham was to make his way from the cleared area as best he could, while Munk drove Dawlish to Scotland Yard. Piccadilly was closed from the Circus to Hyde Park Corner, and all traffic was being diverted. Far more people thronged the streets than was usual since the beginning of the war; obviously the rumour of the disaster had spread.

"Before I go into the office, Munk, I must have a wash," said Dawlish.

"I'll take you to the cloakroom, sir."

Munk was as good as his word. Dawlish spent five minutes in the cloakroom, feeling fresher and fitter than when he had entered.

He was able to smile to himself when he entered Morely's office. The A.C. had changed, and but for his bandaged hand

and the gauntness of his lean face he showed no signs of the affair in Piccadilly. With him were three men familiar to Dawlish, and standing nearest the window was the thickset figure of Sir Robert Knighton, Chief Constable. Not, Dawlish thought, an impressive C.C.

The Home Secretary, tall, willowy, and grey-haired, with the Minister for Home Defence, a man of medium height and dressed in almost dandified fashion. His rounded, benevolent features had lost much of their familiar geniality. As Dawlish entered there was a silence that seemed to speak of the shock which each man there was undergoing.

"Ah, Dawlish." Knighton stepped forward, bright blue eyes looking the dishevelled Dawlish up and down. "We wanted——"

Morely's eyes matched Dawlish's, with a smile that was sombre yet admitted that Dawlish had attempted what he always contrived to do—get his word in first, and thus take virtual control of any group he was with. In undertones Dawlish, Knighton, and the Minister for Home Defence talked while the Home Secretary said sharp things to an official at the Ministry of Information, and gave detailed directions. Finished, he joined the quartet now sitting round the A.C.'s desk.

"I was going to say," said Pat Dawlish, and with a gesture he appeared to invite the august Minister to join in the group, "they worked to a preconceived plan, there's no doubt of it. My visit and purchase made them aware of the possibility of a police raid, and preparations which must have been ready some time before were put into operation. As far as I can tell there were no heavy parcels taken from Misslethwaites, which suggests there is a lot of cocaine and other stuff there. It's being searched?"

"Of course," said Knighton, a little stiffly. Dawlish had been brought to answer questions, not to ask them. In their past encounters Dawlish had always contrived to make Knighton feel uneasy and dissatisfied: it was a disturbing habit.

"Their most important problem," said Dawlish, "was to get the personnel safely away. Sir Archibald tells me that only three of the staff remained in the shop, and that suggests all of the others were concerned in the drug-distributing from Misslethwaites. The problem is—who was the leader? And there's a bigger one. Where did the thirty-odd men go? They left on foot, it's probable that they're somewhere in London at this minute. Find them, and we'll find the centre of the business. They would never have taken such steps to get away if it had not been essential from the leader's point of view to have them safe. At least, it looks that way."

"Ye-es," said the Home Secretary hesitantly. "I——" he lifted his hand helplessly. "I must admit it, I'm out of my depth."

"If they're in London, we'll find them," said Knighton.

"How?" flashed Dawlish. "Not one was recognizable, all

wore gas-masks. But it's our main problem, gentlemen, and we haven't much time to lose."

"Why?" demanded the Minister for Home Defence.

"My dear sir," said Dawlish, "these people have been forced into the open since yesterday—*yesterday*—and they've adopted methods amounting to open warfare. *Unless* they were prepared to carry on with them they would not have started. What it is I don't know, but there's more than a crime-wave in the offing, there's a threat we can't properly appreciate. I'd say," he added, very softly and yet in a tone that carried an almost frightening grimness, "that I'm scared, gentlemen, scared to the marrow, in fact. You see—if there are thirty men there might be fifty. Or a hundred. Even more."

"Are you suggesting——" began Knighton stiffly.

"I'm suggesting they're going on the rampage," snapped Patrick Dawlish. "I don't know how, I don't know where, but inside twenty-four hours we're going to see a minor hell in London, *unless* we find where they are."

He broke off with a gesture of annoyance, for the telephone rang sharply. Morely lifted it, paused, and then looked at the Home Secretary.

"For you, Sir Arnold."

"Me? Right, thanks——"

Sir Arnold Clavering took the receiver, and his austere, aristocratic face was set, as if he were about to talk face to face with the man at the other end of the wire. Dawlish was watching him and saw his fingers tighten about the hand-instrument. The others heard him exclaim, and saw the expression on his face—it might have been dread, horror, consternation, disbelief: all four were mingled.

Clavering's hand sagged, the ear-piece dropped several inches. Dawlish moved swiftly, took it, heard that suave voice, and interrupted in a fair imitation of Clavering's drawling, affected tone.

"Repeat *just* what you said, please."

"That," said the man at the other end of the wire, "suggests that you are going to be sensible. After all, you can do with a rest, Sir Arnold"—Dawlish heard the mocking, sardonic note, and was on tenterhooks for what was coming—"and your immediate resignation will be understandable in view of today's disaster, *and* your poor health."

And slowly Dawlish realized that the man at the other end of the wire was *demanding* the Home Secretary's resignation.

CHAPTER XXI

'RESIGN OR . . . ?'

It did not make sense.

Or at least it did not appear to, and Dawlish collected his

wits as well as he could, hearing a repetition of the threat of another 'incident' like that of the afternoon. The casual voice at the other end of the wire did not sound flurried, it was cool and measured, and to Dawlish that of a man who not only knew what he wanted but believed that he was going to get it.

And the *reason* for it.

He saw that Morely was already speaking softly on another telephone, knew that the A.C. was having the call traced. And he answered, still in Clavering's affected voice:

"It—it is *quite* outrageous."

The other voice hardened.

"You've been told before, don't make the mistake this time of ignoring me."

"I——"

"I shall expect the morning papers to report the resignation," the other went on sharply. "Understand that."

"But——"

"I've stayed quite long enough," said the speaker, and he laughed, a low-pitched mocking sound, before the line went dead.

Clavering was staring at Dawlish, with his eyes narrowed and dull. Knighton and the Minister for Home Defence were on tenterhooks. Morely raised his voice:

"Quickly, please—where was that call from?"

"A telephone kiosk, sir, in Chelsea."

"Just where?"

"By the Town Hall, I think, sir. I'll confirm."

Morely pressed a bell while listening, and Trivett came in, hollow-eyed and yet in his movements alert enough.

"A man's just telephoned from the kiosk close to Chelsea Town Hall," snapped Morely. "Find him, and hurry. Don't waste a moment, Trivett. . . . Right, thanks." He banged down the receiver, having the confirmation of the location of the call-box from the operator. "It's absolutely vital, Trivett."

"At once, sir." Trivett disappeared. Dawlish replaced his own receiver and looked hard at Sir Arnold Clavering. In his mind a dozen questions were humming, and chief among them the *why* of this demand.

There was something else, something which it seemed hard to believe, and yet which had come so easily from the speaker's lips that there could be no object in doubting it.

"You've been told before."

Clavering cleared his throat, and as he spoke Dawlish felt admiration for a man who, in the past, he had viewed with a mild toleration and at times almost contempt.

"Gentlemen, that was an outrageous message from someone I do not know, but who has been demanding—*demanding*—my resignation for some weeks past."

"Good God!" gasped Knighton blankly, and the Minister

for Home Defence could only stare. Clavering lifted his hands a helpless gesture.

"I've told you that much, I can do no more just now. I *must* discuss the matter with the Prime Minister before it goes further. Mr. Dawlish, I am relying on your discretion, of course."

"You can," Dawlish said quietly. "But the ultimatum needs a quick answer, Sir Arnold."

"What ultimatum?" asked Knighton.

"My resignation or a similar outrage to that already suffered," said Clavering, and now that he had talked he seemed in firmer control of himself. "Until I have other instructions, Knighton, you will do nothing to interfere with present arrangements for apprehending the—the men concerned. Dawlish, of course, is right, it is likely to be crime on an unprecedented scale. If only I knew *how* it would operate, if there was only time to investigate, it would be better."

"You've got a few hours," said Dawlish. "He said he expected to see the news in the morning's papers. There are a lot of things we can do in that time, Sir Arnold."

"Ye-es. Are you coming, Willison?"

The benevolent Minister for Home Defence looked as if he had passed through a maelstrom of varying emotions, and he groped somewhat blindly for his hat. Knighton went with them out of the room, and Morely looked at Dawlish, uncomprehending.

"What *does* it mean?"

Dawlish laughed, but not with humour.

"It's possible that they've been trying to blackmail Clavering into resigning; he's probably got a skeleton in the cupboard and he's likely to be telling the Prime Minister about it soon. But as far as this business is concerned, it means that they're using the crack-up of this morning to get Clavering jittery, to get rid of him, in short. As Home Secretary he controls so much, Morely—you and Knighton, for a start. With a Home Secretary who was more easily amenable to—er—suggestions, that might be important. Who'd take his place?"

Morely stared. "That's fantastic——"

"It all is. I suppose Garner's the most likely man, and Devoe is a close second. I'll see whether I can get anything about them, old man, but like most of the other things it's an aside, it's not the main issue. The main issue once looked like being drugs. I wonder if it is?"

"Can't the Farrimond woman talk?" snapped Morely.

"I don't know, Farningham's trying to find out, but it might be an idea if one of the Harley Street men examined her. I doubt if she'll know much; if she did she wouldn't be alive, they must know where she is. And we must know where they are, Morely; until we've located them we can't get away with a thing. And we haven't a line."

"There's just a chance," Dawlish said, "that the post-mortem on the man who died at de Mond Mansions might help. Did you know him, by the way?"

Morely started. "Lord, I'd forgotten. Yes, he's been through our hands a dozen times, usually on trivial offences. A Dr. Arthur Sloane—drink and drugs slowly killed a decent suburban practice; the last we'd heard of him he was in lodgings in Bethnal Green, practising unofficially. He was struck off the register for unprofessional conduct twelve years ago. A wreck of a man, Dawlish."

"He looked it, yes. How long since you've had him here?"

"Oh—three years or more. We'd lost trace of him for eighteen months, when his last ticket-of-leave expired."

"Can you have a description circulated? Damn it, he and the Greys are men to notice, and they must run to earth somewhere in London."

"I put a description out an hour ago," said Morely early. "It doesn't make sense. I feel as if I'm sitting on a volcano."

"Precisely what I've been feeling since yesterday afternoon," said Patrick Dawlish. "No Morrell, Chloe right out with some blasted drug, Lady Betty missing again, Misslethwaites destroying a hundred years' reputation—by the way, the board of Misslethwaites. You're checking up?"

"Of course. There are three directors, two of them just names—Mortimer Grayson and Lord Ankrett—and the managing-director is a son-in-law of the last Misslethwaite, a man named Adams."

Dawlish said slowly: "Adams, I—— *Adams?*"

He shouted the name the second time, and Morely stared at him in surprise.

"Yes; does the name mean anything to you?"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Pat Dawlish, "there's certainly no sense in this. *Adams!* Morely, there's a Colonel Robert Adams living in de Mond Mansions. Be discreet and find if he's any relative of the Misslethwaite gentleman."

"My dear man, the name's not unusual."

"Nor as common as you might think," said Dawlish. "Have a shot at connecting them, anyhow. And what about your Adams and the guinea-pigs?"

"Grayson and Lord Ankrett are in the country; they've been living out of town since the beginning of the war. Adams himself has been to the Manchester branch of the firm—I 'phoned the office. Yes," he added as Dawlish started to speak, "I've also told the Manchester police to have him followed, and the four branches of the firm in Great Britain are being closely watched. But there's going to be no precipitate action this time, Dawlish, we're not risking another horror like today's."

"I'm not blaming you for that," said Dawlish. "But it isn't in your hands, old man. If the High Beings see fit not to let Clavering resign, we'll get one."

"You're certainly associating yourself with us," said Morely.

"At your invitation," flashed Dawlish. "I was going to say that we need to find the key to it, Morely, and I'll lay my shirt on it being a simple key when we've found it. Let's go back to the start——" he was standing in front of the empty fireplace. "Drugs: and the thing that worried you was drugs in high places. The Black Out Club was suggested and the Chloe-Morrell angle suggests there might be something in it. There was also the Knight Templar. Why suspect?"

Morely frowned. "Known distributors—people who used to handle the stuff—were frequenters."

"They haven't been raided?"

"No."

"It might be an idea if you went through them before the crowds get there and real damage can be caused. If there's a rendezvous at either of them it should show some results."

"Ye-es. Two days ago I would have said we'd nothing to raid them on, but now . . ." Morely hesitated. "Do you want to be on the spot?"

"No. But if I dare suggest it *might* create a shindy like this afternoon's, and if you have plenty of men about it would help. Or might help."

"I'll have a look at them," Morely promised, and he eyed Dawlish keenly. "What will you be doing?"

"I don't know—yet." Dawlish hesitated. "There's one connection, as far as I can see, between this business with Clavering and the drugs affair. A man at the Foreign Office and another at the Home Office—or was it Admiralty?"

"Admiralty," said Morely quietly.

"Hmm. Well, they're known drug-addicts. There might be a lot of people who take the stuff but aren't known. Another thing, old man—three-quarters of the staffs of all the offices are out of London. Secrets and important information are duplicated, they have to be—there has to be communication between one part of an office and another. You could conceivably make sure that no one in Whitehall is a drug-taker, but you'd find it hard to trace the people in the safety areas. Wouldn't you?"

"Not hard. Impossible." Morely searched the other's face. "What are you driving at, Dawlish?"

"I'm not really sure myself," said Dawlish slowly. "It's too big, Morely, far too big—so big that it can't be possible. But the Home Secretary *was* virtually ordered to resign while in the office of the Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard. They *are* big."

"Whatever you're thinking you should pass on," said Morely sharply.

"Oh no," said Dawlish. "I pass on facts and keep my fancies to myself. See about that Adams angle, will you?"

He lifted a hand and moved towards the door. Morely started to protest, and then realized that it was useless.

"Impossible!" snorted Morely, and felt better.

Half an hour afterwards he had three reports on his desk. The first claimed that as far as it was known Mr. Charles Mullinger Adams had no male relatives, and he smiled a little grimly at the failure of one long shot of Dawlish's. There was little to smile at in the rest of that report, for Charles Mullinger Adams had left Manchester that afternoon, and had not since been seen.

"He could be on the way to London," Morely thought, and thought aloud. "I'll have St. Pancras watched." He gave the necessary instructions by telephone, and took the second report from his desk. He read it, scowling. It was a house-memo, stating that the necessary precautions had been taken by the police of Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Sheffield to watch the premises of Misslethwaites, gold and silversmiths, in accordance with the Scotland Yard and Home Office request.

He looked at the third report. It comprised the total list of casualties in the battle of the Arcade. There were, so far, twenty-four deaths, thirty-three seriously injured, and over a hundred casualties in need of medical attention. A frightening list—a frightening ruthlessness. And there were virtually no contacts, unless Chloe Farrimond was one—and Chloe, according to a specialist who had 'phoned him earlier, was suffering from shock as well as the results of an unknown—or at least unrecognized—poison.

Too big, Dawlish had said.

Morely felt that the other was right—the whole affair was too big, too alarming. But what was it, what did it mean, what was likely to happen?

Which question was in Dawlish's mind as he walked along Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square, and took the longer route to Piccadilly and thus Brook Street. He reached his flat, went warily upstairs, and wondered whether Farningham had been lucky in finding the two men from the 'Shop' or any trace of them.

The 'Shop' had on its books several ex-Yard men who were also interested in physical training, and the manager would not have sent anyone untrained in shadowing to watch Cunningham and Betty. Reliable men should have sent word, unless the Piccadilly disaster had disabled them.

He unlocked the door of his flat, flung it open, hesitated and, when he felt reasonably sure there was no one inside, went through. As he went he stopped short, and his stomach heaved.

For two men were lying on the carpet, side by side——

Hefty-looking men, quite dead.

As he stared he knew they were the men who had followed Lady Betty as her bodyguard—but what was worse they had been killed by knife-cuts in the throat, as horribly as Jeffery, Sir Louis Morrell's secretary.

CHAPTER XXII

A SECOND MEETING

At the time that Pat Dawlish was entering his flat and making the discovery of the murder of his assistants, there were five people in the study at the Wimbledon house. Larramy was standing, the other four sitting. Number Four, who so rarely appeared at the meetings, was in Larramy's chair, and facing his three colleagues. Larramy's wild eyes were those of a fanatic.

"It's suicide, I tell you; you can't go on like this; if I'd known——"

"You do precisely what you are told to do," said Number Four. Like One and Two he was bearded—and his beard was jet-black, neatly trimmed and yet heavy enough to disguise the lower half of his face completely. He had a sharp, incisive voice, and Dawlish would have recognized the timbre as that of the man who had talked to Clavering. "You have had control of a part of our organization, Larramy, and up to a point you have done well. In the present emergency you are showing yourself in a less favourable light. Dawlish has escaped completely; you were not responsible for Sloane's death, you had made no preparations——"

"I told Muller to shoot."

"The report is that Muller did shoot, and missed."

"He was driving at the same time, you can't expect miracles!" snarled Larramy. "I want to know more about that Piccadilly show. I know Misslethwaites was one of our clearing-houses."

"The affair there was arranged by us," said Number Four more slowly and calmly, "but it remains none of your business. As far as I can discover all you have done that is satisfactory is to get the Lorne woman, and that was half-done for you; two men who were shadowing her were removed."

Larramy started. "Who——?"

"It was arranged," said Number Four. "Now, Larramy, listen. This house is reasonably safe, although if Sloane had lived it would not be, he would have talked. There are several of your men who might talk, and in consequence no one of them is to leave here until I give permission. Is that understood?"

"I——" Larramy, who had reckoned he was the equal of any man, was frightened, and it was not hard to see that. The blowing-up of a block of tenements in a little-known South American

republic was a different matter entirely from the massacre at the Arcade—the chief difference in Larramy's opinion being the respective abilities of the police forces: he had some regard for Scotland Yard.

"Listen, Larramy—we have three hundred men waiting for the moment we say go."

"Three *hundred*!"

"And more if they're needed," said the man with the black beard. Behind his thick-lensed glasses his eyes were sharp and angry, but there was a variety of reasons why they should not antagonize Abraham Larramy just then. "We shall proceed for a week, or a little more, Larramy, and among the things we have to do is hold up deliveries of foods from Southampton and Liverpool. I'm giving you fifty men, and you will handle the Southampton end."

"But how?"

"Don't act like a schoolboy!" snarled Number Four. "There's a black-out you can work anything in, and you'll have all information about road and railway shipments. Larramy, you've taken an easy twenty thousand pounds as your share of the proceeds—or haven't you kept a record?"

Larramy straightened up, and even essayed a smile.

"That's right, twenty-one thousand."

"You will have that doubled in a week," said Number Four, "if you carry out instructions. They're simple enough."

"Okay," said Abraham Larramy, and he grinned. "The twenty thousand comes my way right now, I reckon."

"You'll get half now, and half when it's over. And Larramy, it was necessary to get rid of Lancelot Grey, I admit, but you should have blamed the police for the accident. Jonathan has been talking, and he is not well-disposed towards you. He will not stay here, nor will he be with you. I'm warning you to be careful if you meet him again. I don't want trouble from inside."

"You don't have to worry about Grey," said Larramy, and he swaggered from the arm of the chair. "Anything else, gentlemen?"

"The payment and further instructions will reach you before the night's out," said Number Four. "Work immediately, and don't make mistakes."

"Give me the men, I'll do your work for you."

"Excellent," said Number One, speaking smoothly for the first time. "All right, Larramy, we are leaving immediately."

Larramy nodded. Number One stepped towards the door after picking up his hat and coat. The others were just behind him as he opened the door—and opening it he heard a rustle of satin. Ma Fiannigan's pock-marked face was staring expressionlessly at Number One, who started back.

The woman tossed her head, sneered, and marched away.

The four Members repressed their comments, and went downstairs to the closed car. While in the study Abraham Larramy was wondering how long he dare wait before he cleaned up and disappeared. There were times when things grew too hot, and he believed such a time was at hand.

CHAPTER XXIII

FACTS, NOT FANCIES

PATRICK DAWLISH stood for some seconds in the doorway of the room, and then stepped over the two bodies to the telephone. He called Morely, and the A.C. was on the other end of the wire quickly,

"Dawlish again," said Dawlish heavily. "You'll recall my talk of Slim and Monty. They were two ex-Yard men I had from Tony's Gymnasium—you know it, of course."

"Yes. What about them?"

"Lured to my flat," said Patrick Dawlish, "and there murdered in precisely the same way as Jeffery. If you've forgotten Jeffery, he was Morrell's secretary. Clever, isn't it?"

"How long have the men been dead?"

"Not long, I'd say. Just a moment——" Dawlish stooped down, and touched the outflung arm of the man nearer him. "Quite warm, probably they were alive fifteen minutes ago. Their instructions were to follow Lady Betty, and almost certainly they obeyed them. She was in the Arcade a short while before the mess there. I'm not yet sure whether this is an awful warning to me not to meddle, or whether they're deliberately trying to frame me. Any ideas?"

"I'll send Munk over, I can't spare anyone else for an hour or two. He'll take your instructions."

"Thanks. Meanwhile try to find from the local Roberts if a car was seen outside here in the recent past, will you? Did you get that specialist's report on Chloe?"

"Yes—it's quite genuine."

"Hmm. If only we knew what Chloe knows. No trace of any of the others, I take it . . . no. Adams?"

"The Misslethwaite man is 'Charles Mullinger' and he isn't known to have a male relative."

"Not helpful. Grayson and Ankrett?"

"They're on the way to London," said Morely, "with some local men. Ankrett isn't pleased at being told to come, he doesn't appear to take his job as a director of Misslethwaites very seriously. Grayson, I'm told, thinks it a bore—he's the type."

"Ye-es." Dawlish knew Lord Ankrett by sight and reputation. He was a peer on the wrong side of middle-age, very conscious of his position and, being a Tory die-hard of die-hards,

convinced that the country was going to rack and ruin. Mortimer Grayson, on the other hand, was a different type—suave, well-mannered; Eton and Balliol; but a man-about-town in—Dawlish privately considered—the worst sense of the word. A dandy with a reputation for style not far below Morrell's, he spent four months of the year on the Riviera, and the rest in England. Or he did normally: there had been no French trip for him that year. As directors of Misslethwaites both men were purely decorative; the man who mattered there was Charles Mullinger Adams.

"What of your Adams?" Dawlish asked.

"He's on the way to London, I hope," said Morely.

"Like that, is it? Well now, Garner and Devoe—you still don't know who is most likely to step into Clavering's shoes?"

"I don't know that anyone will."

"Oh yes, they will," said Dawlish with confidence. "He's going to resign, and the statement to that effect will be in the morning papers, I'll bet my last shilling on that. The man has guts; I realized it for the first time today."

"I'm not a political prophet," said Morely wearily. "I don't see that it makes a great deal of difference."

"No-o. You might try discreetly to pry into their private lives, old man. After all, the Home Secretary is a whale of a fellow, and more these days than we always wot of. What with the new Dora regulations and one thing and another we can't call our lives our own. Or can we?"

"I'll inquire where I can," Morely said cautiously.

"Do, there's a good fellow. Facts, not fancies, mind you. Anything from Misslethwaites yet?"

Morely drew a deep breath. "The cellars are filled with cocaine and heroin, Dawlish; we've found our source of supply. The stuff has been coming into the country consigned to Misslethwaites, who've such a reputation that their declared imports have been accepted with only a cursory examination by the Customs people." The A.C. laughed, unexpectedly. "Yesterday morning I would have been sitting down and congratulating myself about the find, but now—why do you always land us in for something more than we expect, Dawlish?"

"Me?" demanded Dawlish with some spirit. "Don't blame me, blame those brushes. They got lost and started this trouble, but it must have been ripe for starting anyhow."

"Dawlish, what have you got in your mind?"

"Our friends might cash in on the present emergency," said Dawlish, as if speaking to himself. "Look at the thousands of ways they can do, old man. I mean, if they can kick Clavering out of office, there's no limit to what they can manage. We've uncovered their drug base, or one of them, but we haven't the slightest reason in the world for thinking that's all they're handling. However, fancies aren't facts."

"I'll send Munk over at once," said Morely, and he rang down.

Dawlish grinned, replaced the receiver, lit a cigarette and then brought a blanket from the spare bedroom and put it gently over the bodies of Slim and Monty. He had seen them only for a few minutes, and yet in a way they had died for him. He started to dial Farningham's number when Farningham, who had a key of the flat, came in. He saw the bundles on the floor, and frowned at Dawlish.

"What's this? And I'm thirsty."

"Beer in the cabinet," said Dawlish. "We'll drink it in the other room." He explained as he carried two bottles into the small dining-room, and squatted on the corner of the table. "Altogether a nasty business. Had they reported to the 'Shop'?"

"No—no word."

"Hmm. Nothing of Betty?"

"No." Farningham lowered his beer thoughtfully, and his tongue ran along his lips. "I'm not liking it a bit, Pat. Do you think Andy's story was wholly genuine?"

"It's a moot point. Anyhow, I don't know whether Andy is putting anything across us, but I'm prepared to wager that Betty's all right. And she's gone. Not a nice way of going, either. We have also to consider the fact that Slim and Monty were brought here and murdered, in the flat. Cool work, the kind of work the Greys might have done, or one Grey since Lancelot is dead. Bill—" Dawlish put his hand into his breast pocket, drew out a pencil, and then a small diary. He opened the diary and as he talked, slowly but clearly, he was scribbling. "Bill, there are two distinct shows running side by side. Quite obviously the brushes hold a secret concerning personnel. The desperate effort to retrieve them suggests that the leader, or a leader, of this racket could be betrayed by the brushes."

Farningham scowled and swilled his beer round.

"Why so obvious?"

Dawlish considered. "Well, here is a drug-racket running very smoothly, and judging from the quantities involved probably showing a profit of some tens of thousands a month. Other things have been prepared, and waiting for the kick-off, but the only reason why a big show like the drugs should be jeopardized is the possibility—I say possibility, Bill—that the leader might be found. The start of major operations really coincided with the loss of the brushes, there's no doubt of that."

"Involved," said Farningham judiciously, and he took the note which Dawlish pushed across the table towards him. "I think"—he broke off. Only the expression in his eyes showed what he was feeling, for Dawlish had written:

*Flat occupied. Stand by.
Look surprised.*

"You think all wrong," said Dawlish, and he sounded testy. Speaking, he glanced towards the closed door, and he saw the handle turning slowly. From the first, from the moment he had realized that the two men had been killed inside the flat, he had realized the probability that others were present, and he particularly wanted to create the impression that he had no such idea. "Once we find those brushes, Bill, we should get places."

And then the door opened abruptly, and he saw Jonathan Grey standing there, pale-faced and as vague-looking as when he had first appeared in Dawlish's ken, except that he now carried an automatic which was fitted with a Maxim silencer.

Farningham stepped back a pace, and made a sharp movement towards his pocket. The gun in Grey's hand moved up sharply, and Grey snapped:

"Keep still. Dawlish, I haven't come for a long visit. I've heard enough, and I've heard that you don't know anything of importance, but you're right about those brushes. Never mind about that now. You've been ineffective most of the time, but you killed my brother."

Dawlish said, as though with an effort:

"Don't be a fool! Your own men——"

"If you had stayed away from Lister Street there would have been no trouble. I was fond of my brother, Dawlish. I'm killing you because of him, not for any other reason. I've had those instructions but I don't give a damn about instructions; before I'm through I'll shoot every man who took any part in Lance's murder. Understand?"

"You don't seem to stop at murder yourself," Dawlish said, and his breathing was sharp and quick, his eyes roved about the room as if seeking some means of escape. "Doesn't it occur to you that he got what was coming to him? As did Sloane?"

"Sloane was a drunken sot, he was useful only because he could save us from calling in outside medical help." Grey shrugged. "But I'm wasting time." He put his left hand into his pocket, and brought out a small note-pad and a pencil. He tossed them to the table. "Write to my dictation, Dawlish."

Dawlish hesitated.

"Write!" The gun moved, and Dawlish picked up the pencil slowly.

"All—set," Dawlish said.

"Write this:

"Dear Lady Betty,

"If you are advised by me you will carry out the suggestions of the bearer of this note. I can see no object at all in your refusing, it will cause both trouble and perhaps disaster on a scale greater than that which you saw this afternoon. Andy, I can assure you, is quite safe and well—any objections which you raise might well

make it even more difficult and dangerous for him. Believe me, I have written this only after much consideration, and please believe me to be, yours most sincerely, Patrick Dawlish."

Dawlish had no trouble in keeping pace with his dictation, and with his own thoughts. He felt a moment of elation, for he could have had no better proof that over some matter of importance Lady Betty was proving awkward.

But if she were too awkward . . .

Grey tossed an envelope.

"Write her name on that."

"What's the address?" asked Dawlish as he started to write, and Farningham's eyes narrowed. Dawlish hardly believed it possible to get any result, the effort was as long a shot as he had ever made.

"Clunes, Common Road, Wimble—" Grey stopped, lifted his head sharply, and snapped: "You think you're clever, Dawlish! If I'd told you it all it wouldn't have helped you."

And then Dawlish tossed a little glass phial towards him.

He did it so quickly that Farningham was taken by surprise, while Dawlish just bent his knees, lowering his height by a full six inches. A bullet from Grey's automatic snapped out, hummed over Dawlish's head, and struck against the wall—at the same second as the glass phial broke into his face. Grey gasped—and gasping drew in the cloud of ammonia gas which escaped, and as he reeled Dawlish leapt forward and struck the gun out of his hand.

"Widen the window, Bill." He shouted the order as he felt the first bite of the gas himself, and as Grey reached the floor, clawing at his face.

Farningham flung the window up, while Dawlish opened the door wide. A cool draught of air passed through, he coughed a little as the gas bit at his throat, and there were tears in his eyes as well as Farningham's. But Grey was out of action, and *Dawlish had Lady Betty's address.*

He said hoarsely: "Lucky I took those things from Lancelot, Bill, I'd a feeling they'd come in useful. Run through his pockets. I want to 'phone Morely again. Facts, this time, not fancies."

CHAPTER XXIV

CLUNES, COMMON ROAD

"Yes," said Morely tensely. "Yes . . . of course I understand that, but, Dawlish, are you sure?"

"If you get moving quickly I'll guarantee that you find her at the house," said Dawlish. "And if you move too slowly I'll guarantee you'll find her dead. . . . Then get reinforcements. Have the place so locked up that no one can get out, but for the love of

Mike don't let anyone going in suspect that you're about, they might be due at a certain time. Anyone coming out ought to get well away from the house first."

"Don't try to teach me my A B C," snapped Morely. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going in, I hope," said Dawlish. "You might warn the Wimbledon people that a tall, handsome, fair-haired man will be going in, and should be treated with veneration." He grinned into the telephone. "I'm taking Farningham with me, and if we can get inside we might stop more tragedy. It's a chance, anyhow. And if they lock themselves in like they did at the Arcade there'll be hell to pay. Once I'm inside, I'd suggest that the roads are blocked, and the near-by houses evacuated. Precaution being wise in these hectic days."

He replaced the receiver as Farningham looked up from Grey's writhing body. The man was conscious, but—as Dawlish knew only too well—the pain of the ammonia gas was almost unbearable, and he was moaning while still clawing at his streaming eyes.

"Anything?" Pat asked.

"I don't know"—Farningham passed over several papers, while on the floor next to Grey were the likely oddments to be found in any man's pockets. "Figures, mostly."

Dawlish took two of the sheets, and saw that they were covered with figures which, to him, looked like nothing but an array of hieroglyphics. He was scowling when there were heavy footsteps on the stairs, followed by a knock on the outer door.

"Munk," said Dawlish. "And in nice time, thanks be. Bill, Morely's having a cordon flung round this place Clunes, but delaying action until you and I have tried to get in. That is, if you're game to make it. We mightn't get out."

Farningham grinned. "I couldn't trust you on your own, anyhow." He broke off as the knocking came again on the door, this time more heavily. "Could Munk come in?"

Dawlish smiled. "Thanks, old man. *Enter, Sergeant!*" His bellow brought an audible gasp from outside the door, while Munk turned the handle and stepped through. Two C.I.D. men were behind him, and Munk glared at Dawlish, as if all the suspicions he had ever entertained of men working outside regulations were confirmed. Dawlish put a hand on his shoulder, sober and confidential of mien.

"Munk, this is serious. The two men you've been told about are under that blanket. I know them, they were all right and can't help you, dead or alive. There's another cove in the other room—you can hear him moaning—who wants watching closer than anything you've ever watched in your life. The other Grey."

Munk's eyes widened: suspicion dropped away and admiration replaced it.

"I'll see to 'im——"

"Probably he didn't come alone. Are you armed?"

"Yes, emergency regulations——"

"Fine. Stand by the window as I go downstairs, and if I'm followed and there looks like being trouble, pick the man or men off. If you've any doubts about it, remember the Arcade."

"Ye-es," said Munk, and now he looked startled. "Sir Archibald didn't say——"

"He put you under my orders, and you've mentioned the emergency yourself. I mustn't be followed, Munk, and for the time being I want to stay alive—for the good of the community. Got all that now?"

"Yes, sir." The moustaches quivered; Munk was beginning to feel indignant, and in such a mood he was at his efficient best.

"Good. Then hand these papers"—Dawlish passed over the sheets covered with figures to the sergeant—"to Sir Archibald personally. My compliments, and suggest that they go to the Cypher Department at once. And also, Mr. Farningham's compliments and if there should be any delay in our return, will he get in touch with Miss Diana Lefroy in person, and explain what happened?"

Munk stared, as if to understand just why Dawlish had said that.

Indignation disappeared, and he spoke quietly, appreciatively.

"Yes, sir, I'll see to it all. Good luck, sir."

"Thanks," said Dawlish. "We'll go, Bill—no, a moment."

He stepped to the cocktail cabinet, took his flask from his hip pocket, and replenished it. There was an odd smile on his lips. He replaced the stopper and then, from a drawer revealed only by the pressing of a concealed button, took a small packet of .32 ammunition. He slipped it into his pocket, and then deliberately winked at Munk. "Strictly between ourselves, Sergeant!"

"You'll need 'em, sir."

"I hope not."

Farningham was already by the door, and they went downstairs quickly. Farningham's Talbot, with new tyres, was standing outside, its outlines blurred by a dusk that was falling unrelieved by any artificial light. He opened the door of the driving-seat, and as he pressed the self-starter a man moved from the other side of the road.

Another, from the same side but farther along.

"May Munk be quick," said Pat Dawlish, and he glanced towards the end of Brook Street; there was no one else in sight, a rare thing. "I——"

He did not hear the report, for the gun was silenced; but he saw the stab of blue flame that seemed to spring from the hand of the nearer man, and he heard the *whang!* of the bullet against and through the nearside back wing. He ducked, the car jolted forward—and then from the window came two loud reports, for Munk had seen the attack and was in action.

There was a scream——

The man opposite the Talbot dropped down, his gun clattering, and the man farther along stopped still but fired twice. A bullet drilled a small, neat hole through the windscreen, but as it did so Munk fired again—and Munk knew how to use a Webley. Dawlish saw the second man fall, as Farningham steadied the wheel, and scorched to the end of Brook Street. He took the corner sharply, and then swung his wheel to the right, avoiding an oncoming Rolls by a hair's breadth. The passenger in the Rolls leaned forward, sharply—and Dawlish saw the pale, drawn face of Sir Arnold Clavering.

"Funny thing, coincidence," he said. "Slow down, we don't want that Robert sending a call for us."

Farningham obeyed as a policeman who had seen what seemed a piece of criminal driving hurried across Piccadilly. As he approached, fully prepared to be righteously angry, Dawlish took out the pass from Morely. As before, it worked a miracle.

"Thanks," said Dawlish, and he flashed a smile. "Right away, Bill. Clunes, first stop."

Farningham sniffed. "That's fine. And when we've made it, do we just go up to the front door or fly through one of the windows?"

Dawlish chuckled. "The front door, old man, it's far more comfortable. Dawlish and Farningham, Incorporated, Private Sleuths hungering for all the glory. It'll be so damned obvious, old man, that they'll let us in."

"Perhaps. Won't they remember Lister Street?"

"They'll remember, and they'll be prepared. Our job is to get them unprepared. When one comes to think of it," continued Dawlish, leaning back and contemplating the roadway with a seraphic smile on his lips, "I'm fond of Lady Betty, which is as well or I might be reluctant to spend half of my life rescuing her from the villains of this piece. I ought at least to be made first man."

Pondering, Farningham drove quickly, but without risk, making speed because of the traffic thinning now that semi-darkness was closing on London. Victoria—Chelsea—Fulham—Putney—left and over the bridge—Putney Hill——

"Common Road," said Dawlish. "Bear left and keep straight on, old man." He was glancing to the right, and he saw three cars drawn up at the kerb—and rightly he suspected they were police-cars. Trivett had been busy, the Wimbledon police had flung a cordon about Clunes, a cordon which would be closed in when Dawlish and Farningham were inside.

When? Or if!

Dawlish pushed the question aside. It was useless to work on any other assumption than a successful entry.

He said: "Slow down, there's a postman." Farningham

obeyed, and Dawlish opened the window, asking a postman walking along Common Road for direction to Clunes.

"Five or six houses along, sir; you can't miss it, there's a big 'edge."

"Thanks," said Dawlish, and smiled. "Right, Bill."

The thick yew hedge around the house of Abraham Larramy was plain enough even in the increasing gloom. The squat outlines of the house, built on Georgian lines, showed against the darkening sky. Behind some bushes on the Common opposite it Dawlish saw two men. The sight gave him comfort.

"The gate's open," Farningham said. "Straight in?"

"Yes, and scorch."

"Right." Farningham trod heavily on the accelerator. There was a screech of tyres on gravel and then a squealing of brakes as he reached the front door.

Dawlish pushed open the door, and jumped up the steps leading to Clunes. Farningham was only a yard behind him. Both men were breathing hard, for there were so many things they might expect—and a burst of machine-gun fire was among them.

The house seemed silent.

Dawlish rang the old-fashioned, pull-type bell, and the ringing clanged inside the hall, deep and cavernous. But all the time he kept his right hand in his pocket. Farningham did likewise.

Quite abruptly, and without a sound, the front door opened. On the mat in the hall was the thin-lipped vicious-faced Kramm—the chauffeur who had once talked with Lady Betty. His lips were parted in what was intended for a smile, while the gun in his hand did not waver.

"Take your hands out've those pockets——"

Dawlish began: "I——"

"And put them above your heads," said a voice from behind him. It was a throaty voice, and it held an ominous note. Dawlish turned his head, and he saw a thickset man also holding a gun, standing at the foot of the steps. "Look snappy!"

Dawlish obeyed, and Farningham followed suit; anything else was suicidal. With their hands above their heads they stepped into the large, frowsty-looking hall of Clunes, and the thickset gunman followed them. With Kramm keeping them covered from the front, Schuster ran through their pockets, taking out their guns—and from Dawlish the spare ammunition.

"You won't need this," he sneered. "Upstairs, and don't try the funny stuff; these bullets are hard ones."

Dawlish started forward, Farningham following. And as the door closed the police guards signalled to the carloads of police waiting farther along. From all sides, without fuss or ostentation, the police closed in on Clunes; while other officers began to call on the residents of the nearer houses, advising them to evacuate but without saying why.

And while the cordon of local men closed in, Morely, Trivett, and a dozen picked men from the Yard were making quickly for the house near the Common, and a detachment of militia stationed near by received instructions to move up in support.

Each man had a gas-mask.

For a quarter of a mile radius the traffic was stopped and the roads barricaded, cars were diverted and long-suffering motorists raised few arguments. Darkness gradually descended. When Morely and Trivett reached the party of Wimbledon police near the house, it was only just possible to see three yards ahead.

"Nothing developed?" Morely asked the local superintendent.

"No, sir."

But the words were hardly out of his mouth when from an upstairs window of the house there came a blinding flash of white light—and the crash of a breaking window. For a split-second the outline of the house was clearly visible, with the billow of white smoke that followed the flash. Then darkness, with only a dull glow from the room with the broken window to relieve it.

Darkness, and a silence which seemed more ominous because it was the last thing to be expected.

CHAPTER XXV

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

"ABSOLUTELY a cinch, boss." Kramm was grinning as he stood in front of Larramy, at the table used so often by the Members of that mysterious association which controlled the big racketeer.

Larramy grunted. "All right, Kramm. Stay here for a while, and at the first sign of a trick, use your gat. Send them in."

In a few seconds Dawlish and Farningham entered, their hands still above their heads, and Schuster behind them with his gun. Dawlish saw the pallid face and the feverish bright eyes of the man he had seen only once before, and that at Chloe's flat. He saw, too, the sharp features and the very red lips, for the windows were well covered and a good light was shining. Larramy's lips twisted in a sneer.

"You look pretty, Dawlish, you and your boy friend. You can put your hands down, but keep them in sight."

Dawlish drawled: "Nice of you. Be warned, we are not alone, little man."

"Don't lie!" snarled Larramy, and the cloak of culture which he had used at their first meeting dropped away, Dawlish saw something of the naked brutality which was in Abraham Larramy. "You'll like to know there's a sound-box at the front door; all that's said there comes through!"

Dawlish's mouth dropped.

"God, I——"

"You can save your prayers," sneered Larramy. "How'd you make this place?"

Dawlish said: "Your friend Grey came, and he's not so brilliant. He dictated a letter, and when it was finished I dropped one of his brother's ammonia phials near by—it worked this time, too. Grey cracked."

"All right, Grey gave you this address. What else?"

"There were a couple of men watching. I handled them."

"And that made you feel mighty proud of yourself," sneered Larramy. "How did you expect to get through here?"

Dawlish shrugged: "Grey said there were only two people here as well as Lady Betty."

"He wasn't such a fool as I thought," said Larramy, and he grinned. "Open the door, Kramm. Dawlish, we're going to see that dame, and you tell her what that letter told you to. Follow?"

Farningham snapped: "Why the devil should we, if——"

Larramy swung round.

"You'll get yours, but the dame'll get off easier if she does what I say; if she doesn't—remember what Lancelot Grey suggested? Tell her to obey orders—got it?"

"What are the orders?" asked Dawlish oddly.

"You'd like to know." Larramy slipped a gun from a shoulder-holster, so accomplished a motion that Dawlish knew the man was familiar with the method: it taught him more about the pale-faced man than he had known before, and it bespoke American training. "Get upstairs—Schuster, you lead. Kramm, come up behind. No side-tricks, Dawlish."

Larramy was feeling fully satisfied for the first time since his interview with the Members. They had jolted his self-conceit, and the complete humiliation of Dawlish restored it.

Dawlish was wondering when the right moment would come to pull his trick; he had just one, and if it failed . . .

At least he would see Betty, and already it seemed reasonably certain that she was safe enough so far.

What could Larramy want from her?

The letter which Grey had dictated had made it plain that they were demanding something which she was refusing to give.

Did she know anything?

He frowned. The older Grey had kidnapped her, but that had been only as a means of persuading Cunningham to give up the silver brushes. At that time, then, it had not been suspected that she had information or that she could do something. Which suggested that from the time she had been rescued to the time of the outrage in the Arcade, she had learned information which had made her a vital factor in the affair as far as Pale-face was concerned.

They reached the second landing of the house, a small,

unfurnished landing, with a strip of frayed carpet leading along the two passages which went right and left.

Larramy was leading the way along the left-hand passage, which—Dawlish reckoned—led to rooms which overlooked the main road. At the second door the big man stopped, and Kramm went forward, taking keys from his pocket. The door was opened, and Larramy stepped through. Dawlish and Farningham, each with a gun in his ribs, followed.

Betty was sitting on a camp bed, with her legs beneath her, one elbow leaning on a pillow and supporting her body. Dawlish saw her eyes widen in dismay, and heard the sharp intake of her breath.

"Pat——"

"Surely—Dawlish!" snapped Larramy. "And he hasn't come to waste words. Get them out, Dawlish."

Dawlish said, very slowly: "Betty, I don't know what these people want you to do, but you'll have to agree, or . . ." he shrugged, and in the poor light his face looked haggard. But he noticed that the window was painted black, for keeping out the light, and that there were no curtains. He saw these things and yet did not appear to take his eyes off her, and he looked lost and hopeless as he went on: "Well, they've got us where they want us, Betty."

Her lips tightened slowly.

"I—see. You're to persuade me to speak to save your own life, is that it?" The words would have seemed melodramatic but for the slow, passionless utterance, and the look of utter contempt in her eyes. Dawlish warmed towards her, and yet even then the main question in his mind was: *What did she know?*

He laughed, not with humour.

"A wrong guess, Betty; Bill and I are for the long jump anyhow, this is for your sake—or good, call it what you like. You can't help by keeping quiet——"

"You think not?" Her expression was cold, as if she did not believe him, and suddenly he wanted to kick her for her obstinacy. An absurd thought, and yet for a split-second he had imagined her drugged—drugged so that she would want more, so that the craving would become unbearable.

She stopped him with a quick movement of her hand, and Larramy stared at her. At which moment Pat Dawlish winked, deliberately and with apparent amusement. He turned his head, seeing that the two gunmen were away from the door, standing close to him, and in that moment he played his trump card.

His thumbnail scraped on a vesta match taken from his right sleeve, and the match flared. From his left hand a small coil of magnesium tape showed, concealed until that moment up his left sleeve. Before they could move to stop him he put the flaring match to the tape, and the white flare was almost instantaneous. Prepared for it, he closed his eyes and jumped

backwards. He cannoned into either Schuster or Kramm, sending the man sprawling, and he heard the clatter of an automatic on the lino-covered floor. His foot touched the automatic, he stooped down for it, clutched it, and then someone cannoned into him. The safety-catch was off, a sharp *crack*! echoed through the room—and then he reached the door, opened his eyes widely, saw Larramy, Schuster, and Kramm still reeling, dazzled and temporarily blinded by the white flare. The window had been smashed by the shot, and there was a cut on Farningham's right hand.

Betty was standing still, but swaying on her feet, her hands at her eyes.

"Damned smart!" Farningham muttered, and he seemed to be less affected by the glare than any of the others, for he saw well enough to snatch Larramy's gun from his shoulder-holster, and to crack his right fist into Larramy's face. As the man reeled back Schuster grabbed for his gun, also on the floor. Dawlish wasted no time, but fired—and Schuster drew back, blood coming from his right wrist.

"Shut that door!" snapped Dawlish. "Watch 'em, Bill!"

He stepped swiftly to the window, and cracked it with the butt of his gun, breaking the pane of glass completely. The dim light from the ceiling-lamp spread outside, seen by Morely and Trivett and the others who were waiting. Dawlish leaned out, and his voice travelled far, deeper even than he realized.

"Make it, Morely—get in fast!"

There was a shout from the road, men burst suddenly into a run, although he could not see them. He felt a sharp relief searing through him, greater than he fully realized, and as he turned back into the room his grin was inane.

"All hunky-dory," he said. "Gentlemen of Clunes, all ready on a plate."

And then from outside the room he heard the laugh, a high-pitched, cackling laughter which seemed insane. For some seconds he stood rigid, and then he stepped towards the door. Farningham had the three men covered, Betty was sitting on the edge of the bed, the colour drained from her face and her eyes filled with tears brought by the flash.

He flung the door open—

And as he did so a tongue of flame shot into the room from the passage—the passage which had seemed empty five minutes before was now a blazing inferno.

CHAPTER XXV

MA FINNIGAN

THE shock was enough to send Dawlish back and off his balance, while the flames leapt into the room, caught at a rickety bamboo

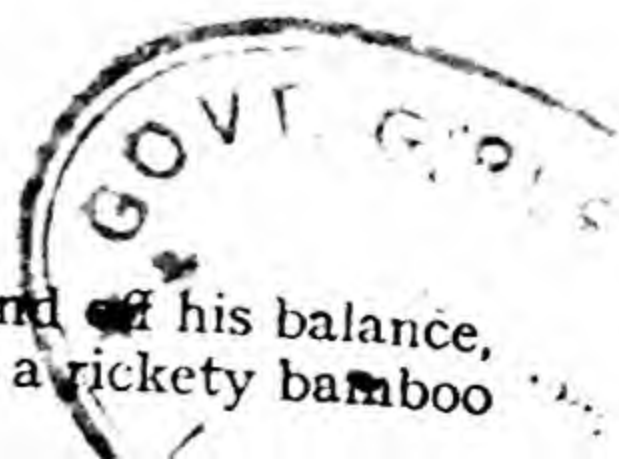


table and set it crackling. Farningham jumped for the table and flung it outside, heedless of scorching his hands. He banged the door to, and although in that moment he had given Larramy and the others a chance of making a break, it had not been taken. Larramy was standing against the wall, terror in his eyes.

"Can we make it?" Dawlish asked, and his expression was bleak.

"Not that way, the whole passage is blazing." Farningham was pale, but spoke casually enough. "Quick work, petrol or something like it. That laugh——"

"Someone's crazy—I'm not sure we aren't all," said Dawlish. "I'll try to get them from outside." He reached the window again, and called—but cars were moving swiftly along the road, the hum of their engines drowning the sound of his voice. Morely was moving a strong force of men into the grounds, it was almost impossible to attract attention.

"Not a hope, this is the third floor," said Farningham.

"I'm trying," said Dawlish briefly. "Keep them under your eye." He worked deliberately at the rest of the glass in the window, smashing every splinter away. Farningham herded Larramy, Schuster, and Kramm into one corner, away from Betty, who was staring at Dawlish with her lips working.

"What—what are you going to do?"

"Try a spot of house-mountaineering," said Dawlish, and he sounded cheerful. "There's help quite close, old lady, don't let it worry you too much."

"But surely the passage is all right."

As she spoke there was a crack like a revolver shot from the door, and a panel of wood split open. Flame leapt through again, its warmth making the room stifling. As Dawlish hoisted himself to the window level the panel was burnt right out, the crackling and roaring of the flames was loud enough for all of them to hear—flames so hot that the air seemed too warm to breathe.

Dawlish climbed outside, his figure lit up by the light from the door. But beyond him there was utter blackness of a world where a few lights were showing, the torches of the police were shaded so that the light did not show from above. Dawlish could see a few points of light in the grounds, but nothing else—and he knew that the chances of his being seen were negligible.

Could he get down?

He groped downwards with his right foot, found a pipe and tested it with his weight. It seemed to offer hold, and he lowered himself to it gradually. It took time, and the precious seconds meant less chance for the others in the room. He gritted his teeth, fighting against impatience which could only bring disaster for it would mean a false step. He reached the window immediately beneath that of the room above—and as he did so a tongue

of flame leapt through the window, showing everything about him clearly for a moment.

And showing him the drain-pipe running straight to the ground, a yard to his right.

Just within reach.

The flame disappeared; he knew Farningham would be trying to block the window with something, and thus stop the draught which would make the fire worse. His right hand touched the pipe, and gripped it. He let his body sag towards it, pressing himself close to the wall as he went. For a perilous moment he hung in mid-air, only clutching the pipe one-handed——

It sagged.

Dawlish's heart seemed to drop, he had a moment of dreadful fear; and then he brought his left hand over, and was able to put some of his weight on a lower section of the pipe. He steadied himself, and then began to go downwards slowly.

Suddenly a beam of light shot upwards; he saw it moving on the wall close to him, and the next moment he was in the beam. He heard voices, none of which he recognized, and he saw that he had only two yards to go. He made one of them, and then dropped. As he touched the ground two men rushed him.

"Take it steady, now!" The official bark of a policeman's voice, the sight of the man's uniform, made Dawlish feel light-headed for a moment.

"Lord! It's Mr. Dawlish!"

He drew a deep breath and said gaspingly:

"Run—an escape—to that window. Straight above—this. Send—three—four men. Make it—fast."

"Yes, sir!" The Yard man swung round, and in the flashing beams of torches, which seemed more frequent now, Dawlish saw that a fire-engine was actually in the grounds. He saw the crew running an escape up to the window, and he grinned inanely.

Dawlish went towards the front entrance, surprised at the unsteadiness of his legs. But he reached the doorway, from which a light glowed faintly. Inside were two uniformed policemen, and as Dawlish went in they barred his path.

"I——" Dawlish bit back on a sharp retort, and was going for his identification card when he heard Trivett's voice.

"Dawlish! Thank God you're all right!"

"All right will serve," said Dawlish, "and I think the others will be. But the top of the house is an inferno."

"I know"—as he drew nearer, Dawlish saw that Trivett's face was blackened, that his collar was scorched. "We can't save the place, it's spreading like the devil. There are three men holding out in the cellar, and others——"

He broke off.

Screams came from above, and then a high-pitched cackling laugh, the laughter that Dawlish had heard from the room.

There were heavy footsteps and shouts—and then a weird caricature of a woman appeared on the first landing—a caricature of tragedy too, for her clothes were burning at the back, her face was working, her hands were raised towards the ceiling. She stumbled as she reached the first stair—recovered herself, and came running down. Her dress was jet-black, her face, distorted though it was, was deathly pale.

She was screaming :

"Members, the Members, I'll give them Members! I——"

She broke off, and went into that high-pitched, insane laughter. She repeated the words and then laughed again, and by then she was at the foot of the stairs, and Dawlish and Trivett were barring her path. Dawlish had his coat off, planning to wrap it about her and to smother the flames.

He stopped her.

Her hands clawed at his cheeks and eyes, her legs worked as she kicked at him. The fury of her rush carried him to the ground, and yet the woman kept on her feet, wrenching herself away from him. She tripped Trivett as the inspector tried to grab her, and she rushed for the door.

"Members, Members, I'll give them Members!"

The two uniformed men closed on her. One stuck out his foot and she stumbled over it and went sprawling as Dawlish picked himself up. But she seemed to be made of indiarubber, for she bounced up again and rushed into the grounds. Her clothes were alight from head to foot, a veritable pillar of flame.

In the reflection Dawlish saw half a dozen men rush towards her. She stopped, as though she knew that she could not get past that number, and then she turned and ran back to the house. Her face was dreadful, and her hair, piled up at the top of her head, suddenly caught alight, a burst of vivid flame. She screamed, and pitched forward on her face—and while the flames bit at her she kicked and screamed, and stopped anyone getting near enough to help.

Trivett said: "My God, what an end! She deserved a bad one, but that was too bad."

"You knew her?" Dawlish showed his surprise.

"Yes, a Ma Flannigan—no, Finnigan. Not a nice creature, but she's been missing for some years."

Dawlish frowned. "Queer thing, these people seem to use a number of one-time crooks, Trivett. Anyhow, it doesn't seem to make much difference. How many others have you found?"

"Just the three in the cellar, and Grayson or Bilson, in one of the rooms. He was in bed, but he tried to get his gun. He didn't"—Trivett shrugged. "They're going through the other rooms now, and the A.C.'s with them. Where are——"

"Farningham and Betty?" Dawlish said. "Outside by now, I hope. Triv, my wild-eyed customer was upstairs with a couple

of roughnecks. With luck, they're also down. It might be an idea if I worked on the man myself; he won't talk easily."

Trivett stared. "But——"

"Regulations, I know. But I could spirit him away."

"Ye-es." Trivett shrugged. "He's your prisoner, Dawlish, but don't turn him into a corpse."

This business, thought Dawlish, was making even Trivett throw regulations overboard, and there was some humour in the thought. He hurried outside again, and now the darkness was relieved by the reflected glow from the fire, which had taken hold of the whole of the top of the house.

He saw Betty.

Farningham was there, *and* the pale-faced man.

Dawlish hurried towards them, and as he went he was thinking of the woman who had run screaming, with the word 'Members' so often on her lips.

And he wondered whether his man could amplify that cryptic utterance.

CHAPTER XXVII

DID LARRAMY LIE?

FARNINGHAM'S clothes were scorched and his hair was singed, while there was a rent in Lady Betty's blouse. But both of them were on their feet, and the girl was actually smiling. Dawlish smiled to himself, if wryly, reached them and called them aside. The man whose name he did not know was standing still, with handcuffs on his wrists. Schuster and Kramm were in the same predicament, but they seemed too scared to worry.

The wild eyes of Larramy did not suggest fear so much as rage.

"A word," Dawlish said *sotto voce*. "Our work's only just starting, Bill; we're going to try to squeeze news out of the big shot. Betty, tie yourself to the biggest policeman in sight and don't let him lose you."

She laughed, a trifle hysterically.

"I've been lost quite enough, thanks."

He pulled her ear, a strange little gesture, and then murmured to the policeman from the Yard who had recognized him:

"I want Mr. Larramy for a short while, for Inspector Trivett."

"Your prisoner, sir."

"Thanks again," said Dawlish. He jerked his head towards Larramy, and Farningham stepped with him to the big man's side. Dawlish gripped his forearm. "Larramy, you and me are going to talk."

Larramy swore. "You . . ."

"Now that's not nice—I saved your life," said Dawlish, but

his voice was sharp. He forced the man to move, and instead of going towards the house he went in the direction of the thick yew-hedge. Between it and the house were a number of tall trees, completely in the shadows.

He stopped near the hedge.

"This'll do, Bill. Now, Larramy, you're going to talk, and if you're slow about it you get hurt."

"You go to hell!"

"I don't like doing this," said Dawlish.

It was true, although the blow he delivered to Larramy's chin was sharp and painful. It was intended to be. Larramy staggered, might have fallen but for Farningham's restraining hand.

"There's too much at stake for foolery," Dawlish said, and his voice was hard. "I'm going to get your story, Larramy, if I have to flay the skin off your back. First—who are the Members?"

He might have dropped a bomb.

Larramy started back, his lips opened, his eyes showed sheer stupefaction. He raised his handcuffed wrists, as though to ward off a blow, and gasped:

"You know—about *them*?"

"It seems like it," said Dawlish, and he was filled with a warm glow of exhilaration. The woman had known what she was screaming about, the word meant something vital. "Who are they?"

"Oh—God! Dawlish, I don't know, I swear I don't know! If I did I'd talk; I might get off with a lighter sentence. I don't know them! They come here in a closed car, they're always disguised; I've worked for them for years and never seen their real faces!" His forehead was beaded with sweat, his lips were working. "Dawlish, I'm telling you God's truth, I don't know who they are! They—they ran the drug racket; Misslethwaites was their place; I told them they shouldn't have pulled that mug's trick, I didn't know a thing about it!"

"Go on," said Dawlish. "You were going out tonight. Right now, do you remember?"

Larramy's face worked. "I—I was travelling to Southampton. I'm directing a hold-up of a goods train; it's being wrecked tonight, I——"

Dawlish snapped: "Which one?"

"It—it's due to leave the docks at one o'clock—there are a dozen men near the Central Station, on a waste patch of land there."

Dawlish's head was reeling under the implications of the statement, and he snapped:

"Any others?"

"I—I think so; Liverpool, Harwich—I don't know much about them, Southampton was my job."

"Where do the men stay?"

"God!" moaned Larramy. "Listen, Dawlish, I'm telling you I don't know, and that's facts, I swear to God it's the truth! I didn't know they'd got others until today—three hundred, they told me. I've been on the small stuff, helping to get the drugs around, but I know one thing——"

"Get it out."

"I'm damned if I will!"

Dawlish struck him again, and this time he was not sorry about it. As he had listened to the plan to hold up goods trains he realized the utter callousness of the man standing there, and he had thought again of the outrage in Piccadilly.

Larramy swayed. Farningham stopped him from falling and punched him lightly in the small of the back. Larramy gasped:

"Stop, stop it, Dawlish, I—they're working something at Whitehall, something big; they've been talking about it for months. They've got a lot of the permanent officials under drugs; they can do practically what they like. Clavering's always held a tight hand on a lot of it; I don't know what, but they've got rid of him, or they think they have."

"Think is right!" snapped Dawlish. "All right, God help you if you've lied. Bill, hand him over to the police; make sure he doesn't get away, and wait for me at the gates." He did not lose a moment, but hurried towards the house again.

Morely was with Trivett on the steps.

"We're getting everything we can out," said Morely, nodding as Dawlish came up. "The study's emptied. You've done a good job here, Dawlish, thank God."

"I hope to do better," said Dawlish, and subconsciously he saw that the police were emptying the place of furniture, and he realized that there was no time for searching the house before it was razed by the flames. "A word where we can't be heard, Morely. And you, my Triv." He smiled, but bleakly.

"Well?" Morely looked intense, his eyes were haggard and looked smaller than usual.

"Larramy—my wild-eyed gent—has talked. He was to have gone down to Southampton to help raid a food-train tonight; there are a dozen other men there for the job. Other parties are on similar jobs at Liverpool, Harwich, and possibly other places."

Morely stared. "My God, Dawlish, if it's true it's disastrous."

"It's true all right, I shouldn't worry about that. More, he says that his employers are planning something at Whitehall, and that Clavering was in the way. A goodly proportion of officials are nicely doped. The only thing," went on Dawlish thoughtfully, "which might not have been the truth was his assurance that he doesn't know who his employers are. Like

Ma Finnigan, he calls them the Members. Four of them, Morely."

"I'll get to a 'phone," Morely said. "Better come with me, we'll get straight back to Westminster. Keep things under your eye here, Trivett; have all the papers scrutinized as quickly as you can and report if there's anything unusual to report." Morely turned, and Dawlish fell in by his side. "Dawlish, do you realize what you've told me?"

"I do. I suggested it was possible earlier."

"You *knew*?"

"My dear man, I knew it was possible. Why should they want the Home Secretary out of the way? Because he's got so much under his direct control these days, and Clavering's a man who will handle things personally, that's why they wanted to get him out of the Cabinet years ago, why he's not popular. Our gents aren't after the new man, they're just intent on getting Clavering nicely out of the way. And obviously they haven't much time to work in; whatever it is will come quickly now. Destroying or detailing goods trains explains something, although I'm damned if I know what. What are you going to do?"

"'Phone direct to 10 Downing Street," said Morely. "I'm not wasting time going through Knighton."

"Knighton won't be pleased, but you're wise. Were those two clubs raided?"

"Clubs? Oh yes. Nothing to show at all."

"Did Adams turn up?"

"No, not yet."

"He won't," said Dawlish, with an odd conviction. He stopped quite still.

"What's the matter?"

Dawlish said: "Just an idea, old man, which might be useful a bit later on. Grayson and Ankrett?"

"They claim to be flabbergasted," said Morely, "and I don't think they're in on the business. They've been questioned by the Home Office people, and they're being shadowed. I suppose," he added dryly, "you're going to tell me that they'll disappear into thin air."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Dawlish.

They were just outside the front door of a house near Clunes—a house which had been emptied because of the raid. "We've made this temporary headquarters. I can 'phone from here."

"Right. I'll be at the gate." Dawlish turned, and walked back quickly along the drive, and at the head of it he saw Farningham. By that time the fire at Clunes was at its height; there was a lurid glare all round.

"Neither of us looks respectable, old man," said Dawlish, "and we're not in favour. Or at least we're not going to be; in plain language I'm going to do a flit."

"Oh lord!" groaned Farningham. "Why and where to?"

"London town. Did you hear that bit about Members?"

"Yes—do you think Larramy knows them?"

"I wouldn't say no, but certainly I wouldn't say yes. What does Members mean to you?"

"Melodrama," said Farningham, "but isn't it all?"

"We'll see. But club members might fit the bill—they're members of something, all soubriquets have a derivative, and this one has. Members of what, my William?"

"Your head's turned," said Farningham solicitously.

"The sad thing is," said Dawlish, "I'm still indulging in fancies, flights of, and that's why we're doing a little more work on our own."

"It's the childish mind," said Farningham, "it must hold its secrets."

"Ye-es." Dawlish was suddenly cold sober. "And they'd best remain secrets for the while, old man, in case I haven't worked them out properly. Be patient for an hour or two more—and you drive, by the way. The card will get us a car."

Morely's signature succeeded, a police-car was put at their disposal, and with Farningham at the wheel they drove towards London. And on their heels was another car, which picked them up just outside the police cordon.

In it was a man with a black beard, a beard that was patently false.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TO WHAT END?

IN his mind Dawlish believed that the affair was fast reaching its climax; and this time he did not feel afraid that things would go wrong. Once they were finished Morely could know the final act would start. He did not believe that the Members would succeed in what they were trying to do, but only vaguely did he comprehend the end they had in mind.

He had to find that first.

Afterwards it rested with others, but he doubted whether those others could do what he was attempting—for the simple but sufficient reason that they would not adopt his methods. There was a double danger—from the Members, and from a too-cautious police attitude; he believed he could handle both.

Farningham started suddenly, and the wheel wobbled in his hand. Dawlish bade him keep his nerve, while Farningham exploded: "Pat, you damned fool! You haven't found what Lady Betty knew, the whole thing might turn on it."

"The omission was deliberate," said Dawlish, "and even if it weren't I don't see a great deal of object in turning the car over."

Farningham breathed heavily. "You're an irritating beggar. What was the idea?"

"Patience, Bill, I haven't worked it all out yet. We're going to have another look-see at Chloe's flat, I think it will help. Oh, I think it will help a lot!" Dawlish chuckled, and Farningham drove for some minutes in silence. It was as he turned into the maze of streets between Sloane Square and Victoria that he said resignedly:

"I suppose you know what you're doing—and I suppose you know a car's been on our tail for the last twenty minutes."

"Twenty-five minutes," said Dawlish promptly. "It's precisely why I came alone, and without any whisper to Morely. We want that Big Shot, Bill, and we'd have scared him away had we been trailed by the police. You collected another gun, I take it?"

"Yes," said Bill shortly.

"Fine. And I provided myself with a key; we don't want a lot of bother getting into Chloe's flat again."

Farningham looked into the mirror and saw the dimmed lights of the following car, and then turned left. He overshot de Mond Mansions, and backed into the short driveway; the other car also drove past, slowly.

"Look the other way," said Dawlish; "don't tell him that we're quite so curious." He opened the door and climbed out, and as Farningham joined him in the darkened entrance porch, he gripped his friend's arm. "Last act, Bill. Still with me?"

"Don't be a fool."

"Right." Dawlish stepped into the hall, past the black curtain which kept a dim yellow light from percolating through into the street. There was complete silence in the building, and he was smiling a little to himself as he pushed the key into the door, hesitated, and then pushed it open sharply. Complete darkness met them, and they stepped through.

And then the light flashed on.

Farningham gasped. Dawlish stood quite still, doing and saying nothing.

Three men, two bearded and one clean-shaven, were sitting in front of them, and all were in evening-dress. At their sides were two gunmen, their automatics fitted with Maxim silencers and pointing towards Dawlish and Farningham. On a settee by the curtained window was Sir Louis Morrell, but a Morrell very different from the *beau* so well known to the illustrated weeklies and Mayfair salons. His face was beaded with sweat, his crinkly hair awry and matted, his shirt—he wore no coat and waistcoat—gaped open at the chest, and on him were two small red marks, which looked angry.

Cigarette burns, Dawlish knew.

The man whose beard and hair were grey, and whom Larramy

knew as Two, was in the middle of the trio, and he spoke gently—the voice Dawlish had heard when Clavering had been faced with the ultimatum.

“Well, Dawlish—you make the same mistake too often, don’t you?”

Dawlish said stiffly: “You think so?”

“I’m quite sure,” said Two gently. “This time you will not get away, it was so foolish of you to come on your own. You were watched from the time you came out of the attic, and our agent assures us that you said no word of this little visit—anxious, I suppose, to make sure that your friends do not meet trouble.”

“It might be.” Dawlish still spoke stiffly.

“A little perturbed, I see,” said the grey-bearded man. “It’s understandable, but you have a reputation for keeping your poise so well, I’m almost disappointed. I——”

Dawlish smiled for the first time.

“Don’t be that, whatever else, you’ve enough disappointments to come. You needn’t torture Morrell, you know, he hasn’t got the brushes. And if he had he’d talk more easily if you kept him short of snow for a few days—one of your own victims, and you didn’t know he was an addict! Too bad,” drawled Patrick Dawlish, and now his attitude was confident, he seemed to lounge, inwardly to laugh.

The words set all three Members bolt upright in their chairs.

“Where are they?” snapped One.

“All in good time,” said Dawlish. “Morrell had them, Jeffery stole them—and incidentally stole them just because they were silver-backed brushes; Morrell didn’t pay him too well. And then our cut-throater visited Jeffery and collared the brushes. Incidentally the same cut-throater—no two men could do a vile job like that—later visited my flat and killed two admirable fellows, which was not a nice thing to do. He did it so cleverly both times, he hoped to make the police start thinking seriously about me, but he didn’t realize that although they dislike my methods they approve of my morals. However, Cut-throater is one of your associates, my Members, a man who stole the brushes and what is in them but did not take you into his confidence. I wouldn’t like to suggest that he preferred to have the stuff to use to coerce you at a later date, but it might have happened. Or mightn’t it?”

Dawlish beamed, as if this was the best joke in the world, and certainly his words had caused consternation. The Members were on their feet, and Number Two stepped forward, his hand raised and clenched.

“I shouldn’t,” Dawlish said.

Like a man in a dream, Farningham saw Morrell, his forehead glistening, leaning forward and staring tensely, saw the automatics in the hands of the gunmen—and the rage in the eyes of

the three men whom the burning woman at Wimbledon had called the Members, which name Larramy had confirmed.

"Who is the man?" snapped Number Two. "Who has the brushes?"

"I don't know his name," said Dawlish amiably. "Not his real name." He was watching the other lynx-eyed, knew that he was playing dice with death, and yet saw no other way of getting at the whole truth. "He's probably thrown the brushes away; the letters inside are what matters. Foolish of you to put your signatures to such damning documents——"

Farningham believed the man would crash his fist into Dawlish's face. He might have done, but Three interrupted, restraining Two's arm and speaking sharply.

"How do you know about the letters, Dawlish?"

"Documents sounds so much more imposing," said Dawlish, and his voice was easy if his body was rigid. "Four Members—Members at one time of the Worshipful Company of Silversmiths, of course. Which of you is Ankrett? And which is Grayson?"

Number One snapped: "You swine, you! Grayson, have him put away at once; he knows, he——"

He spoke to Number Two, and Dawlish laughed, a short, sharp sound.

"So you're Ankrett, that amiable peer, and you"—he mocked the grey-bearded man in front of him—"are Mortimer Grayson. I can't name your third member, and Charles Mullinger Adams isn't here, is he? Not yet. The fourth Member, the travelling Member who controlled the shipments of drugs and some of the selling of it. The organizing mind, I fancy, our Charles Mullinger Adams, and Misslethwaites provided such excellent cover while it lasted. Was it the managing director of Misslethwaites who planned the large-scale crimes, I wonder? Who was prepared to make chaos out of food-shipments up and down the country, who organized several hundred men for that purpose, but so carefully that Larramy did not realize what was happening under his nose? Was it the fourth Member who worked the dope into Whitehall, ostentatiously in the Foreign Office and the Admiralty to get the police concentrating on the wrong angle, while the real efforts were directed towards the Home Office? The fourth Member who realized that Clavering, keeping everything under his personal supervision so much, had to be removed somehow, and discovered the skeleton in Clavering's cupboard?"

Ankrett—the peer *was* Number One—raised his voice again; he sounded panic-stricken.

"Grayson, for God's sake finish him!"

"Let him talk," said Mortimer Grayson slowly. "We'll know just what he thinks he knows before he's finished."

Dawlish smiled. "Thanks. There's no thinking about it. It's all by deduction and constructive application. *Why* cause

an upheaval in the Arcade instead of clearing out as soon as I was known to have been there, and would be likely to send the police? *Why* arrange for troubles with food trains? *Why* hold a large number of men ready for other disturbances? *Why* try to get virtual control of the Home Office? *Why* sell drugs so fast in London that ten or fifteen per cent of the wealthy population take it, and thus need it?"

He paused, and the silence seemed to hum. Farningham was staring, Morrell seemed to have forgotten whatever he had suffered and was leaning forward, his heavy eyes wide open. It was Number Three who broke the silence.

"Well, Dawlish—why?"

"Because the Home Office controls commodity prices," said Patrick Dawlish, and his voice was low-pitched and yet filled every corner of the room. "Foodstuffs, clothing, metals—all commodities. Any member of the Stock Exchange would know that—any man or men with capital enough could buy considerable shares of commodity companies; and, with prices soaring far and above raw material costs, could make a fantastic fortune. It was so clever, wasn't it? Drugs in high places to keep Government restrictions from getting worrying—drugs in so many other places to make it look as though it was a drug-wave. Hold-ups and large-scale crime to present an ostensible reason for the rise in prices, one the House and the public would swallow—the Arcade affair to show the authorities how threatening the crime-wave was: how poor commodity stock-holders were fighting to keep prices as low as possible, while every official who could inspect figures was drugged enough to make sure he would raise no complaints, make no exhaustive inquiries. So water-tight, wasn't it?"

Farningham's head reeled.

Dawlish had spoken slowly, every word taking effect, had drawn a picture of a price-ramp that was almost beyond comprehension, of a profiteering organization setting out deliberately to make all possible capital out of the war, not satisfied with controlled prices but with diabolical cunning putting prices at a level which made fantastic fortunes possible.

Dawlish said easily:

"Profiteering de-luxe. And it might have worked."

Grayson, or Number Two, said gently:

"Very clever, Dawlish, and quite accurate—I don't see how you reached the conclusions, but that's of no account. You've guessed a lot; for instance—you didn't know the papers in the brushes contained our individual suggestions while we were working this thing up—quite convincing evidence of our individual parts. However, you make one miscalculation—it *will* work. You've made your guess, and you came here to confirm it, a thing you could only do yourself. Right?"

"Nicely judged," admitted Patrick Dawlish.

"But it made it difficult for you to make sure of getting away," said Grayson suavely. "In fact impossible. You may stop one or two of our early efforts—Larramy was to have been busy tonight, for instance—but for the rest——" he shrugged. "I'm almost sorry to see you go, Dawlish."

"Too conventional," said Dawlish. "You ought to be nice and melodramatic, like Ankrett, it might frighten me. On the other hand it might not. Your fourth Member, gentlemen—forgotten him? He's got the evidence, you know, *he* murdered Jeffery for the brushes, *he's* been concentrating on getting me put away. He'll have you nicely in a corner—he can take whatever share he likes instead of a humble fourth. He——"

And then the door swung open.

Dawlish had been alert for the slightest sound, and he heard the first turn of the handle. He did not see the black-bearded man enter with a gun in his hand, but he did see every eye turned towards the door. It was then that he acted, taking his life in his hands. He did not move, except to snatch his gun from his pocket, and he kept his finger on the trigger, firing low. Ankrett and Grayson went down, with the two gunmen, and then Dawlish leapt to one side. Farningham snatched at his gun but did not use it, for Dawlish sent him flying with a sweep of his mighty left arm. For a few seconds there was bedlam, men gasping and moaning, blood spilling; only Number Three and the newcomer, Number Four, on their feet, facing each other.

Four snapped: "He was lying, he——"

He turned his gun towards Dawlish, and the flame and lead streamed out, biting into Dawlish's back as he moved. Dawlish pitched forward on to the settee. Farningham saw him and felt a dreadful fear.

Dawlish muttered into Morrell's ear:

"Another gun—in my pocket. Get the man by the door."

And Morrell acted, covered by Dawlish's body. The man in the doorway was moving forward when the bullets bit into his side, and he coughed and staggered. Three swung round—and Farningham fired from the floor, catching the man's thigh and pitching him forward. Farningham leapt towards Dawlish.

And Dawlish, his face twisted in pain, gasped:

"All right, old man. Bruises only—good things, chain waistcoats! Watch the—swine—and watch the—door. His wife—may come——"

Farningham stared. "Whose wife?"

"Colonel—Adams. Nice—fellow! Man who poisoned—Doc Sloane's whisky. God, my—back!" Dawlish stretched along the settee, his lips set and twisted.

And then Farningham saw that the black beard of the man

who had entered—who had followed them from Wimbledon, although Farningham did not know it then—had been dislodged, with the moustache; and he saw the once-genial face of Chloe Farrimond's next-door neighbour.

Colonel Adams!

As he stared, Farningham felt the fantasy of the last few minutes, that whirlwind sharpshooting which Dawlish had relied on, knowing that when he accused Number Four the man would come in if he had been listening. Dawlish had judged the psychology of them all to a nicety, but the gamble made Farningham sweat.

But not so much as the whirring sound from one of the walls.

He swung round—to see the wall opening and the woman standing there. Mrs. Adams, with a gun in her hand, and two men just behind her also armed.

CHAPTER XXIX

OF MEN AND THEIR LADIES

FOR a split-second Farningham felt the hopelessness of trying to avoid death; he did not think it possible. The guns were raised and his was lowered. He jerked his arm up—but even as he jerked, a little glass phial flew from Dawlish's hand and smashed in the woman's face. The cloud of ammonia gas that spread from it sent her reeling back, with the gunmen, while Dawlish shouted:

"Let 'em have it, Bill—no quarter!"

Farningham fired, low all the time to avoid killing. Through the cloud of gas which started to sting his own eyes and mouth, he saw the woman fall, and the men immediately afterwards. He staggered a little, and tears welled into his eyes, while Dawlish moved slowly from his couch, his back easier.

"I'll 'phone the Yard," he said. "From Adams' flat. I wondered what the trick was here; the sliding door was clever. I wonder if Chloe knew that it was put in when she was having her room made soundproof?"

Farningham grunted, his mouth was too painful for speech, but Morrell was farther away from the gas and unaffected. He gripped Dawlish's arm, and his eyes looked haggard.

"She knew, Dawlish, but she couldn't help what she did, I'll swear to that!"

Dawlish grinned crookedly. "Quite sure?"

"Yes, I——" Morrell drew a deep breath, and made a praiseworthy effort to regain his poise. "Dawlish, Miss Farrimond was—was an habitual taker of cocaine; anything she did was under the influence of it, I know. Adams started her on it, forced her to distribute cocaine among—among her friends."

"I—see," said Dawlish, and the news was what he had angled for. It explained Larramy's "she'll be in prison for years", but it did not explain Morrell's part. He shrugged—and wished he had not, for the bruises in the small of his back were agonizing when he moved. "It might go over, Morrell, but your part will want some explaining."

The knight stared. "My part? Dawlish, I have tried in every way possible to get her out of the man's control! I . . ." he hesitated, and Dawlish saw a strange alteration in his expression, a quiet dignity, almost a serenity. "I am in love with Miss Farrimond. I hope you will not insist on my talking too fully, but I feel you deserve to know this. I would have been married but for her association with Adams, and . . ." Morrell hesitated, to go on very slowly: "and with Sir Arnold Clavering. She lived with him, secretly, for some years. She will do nothing now that will endanger his position. I—I admire her for it; I would not have it otherwise. And Adams, you see, has used that also to persuade her to continue operating with him. Dawlish, the torment of not knowing whether she could keep an appointment, or whether Adams kept her away, was unbearable."

Morrell turned his head, and Dawlish eased himself up slowly, looking the other way. Farningham, who had heard everything, met his eyes. Dawlish smiled, a quiet, understanding smile.

"I think I can understand, Morrell, and I'm glad to know the Clavering angle—that puzzled me. The brushes—you bought them for sentimental reasons?"

"Of course, I had no idea what was in them. Not until Chloe tried to get them back from Cunningham without telling me—she was trying to avoid hurting me, she always does—not until then did she know that Adams had used them for these incriminating papers, which he wanted, of course, to use against his partners when the opportunity arose. The—the three men here tonight did not know he had stolen them from Jeffery; they believed I had them. It was not—pleasant."

"It could have been much worse," said Dawlish. "No one but Adams knows of Chloe's part in this business?"

"And these other people. His wife, of course. It started with his wife's friendliness with Chloe. The wife is an addict. I don't altogether blame her, but"—Morrell straightened his shoulders—"it will have to come out, of course."

Dawlish said: "Will you face it?"

"I shall wait for her," said Morrell with a quiet dignity that was impressive. "It will be best to get it over, the strain has been unbearable."

"Ye-es," said Dawlish, and then lightly: "Did you know Lady Betty Lorne?"

Morrell shrugged. "I wondered if you would guess that."

I knew her slightly. She came to see me—when was it? Yesterday; it is incredible that it has happened so quickly! Her fiancé was worried about Chloe, who had 'phoned him several times, and—well, I told her the position. She had no cause to worry. She wanted the brushes, of course. I told her what they contained——”

Morrell broke off, for Dawlish snapped his fingers, and his eyes were shining.

“She *knew* they were there, Larramy only suspected it—just as well she didn't tell, but I could have told Morely without worrying.”

“What on earth——” began Morrell.

“Bill knows,” said Dawlish, and he laughed as he looked about the room, at the eight people on the floor, wounded, unable to move. Eight people, the leaders of the biggest crime association since the war began, who deserved and would get death. . . .

“Do you happen to know where they keep their gunmen?” he said almost casually.

“No,” said Morrell. “But I believe they keep them at various places; some I know are at a small hotel in St. John's Wood, run by a man named Askew——”

“Askew!” snapped Dawlish. “The man named on the envelope.” He shrugged, and winced, and went on: “It's happened so quickly I've forgotten even that address. Morely'll trace them; there are bound to be records here or at Wimbledon.”

“Adams keeps them himself, in his study.”

“Nice work,” said Dawlish, and he smiled again but there was no humour in his eyes, his expression was suddenly bleak. “And the gas?”

“I don't know,” said Morrell.

“I'll find out,” said Dawlish. “Bill, keep them all in sight, they may yet try tricks.”

He stepped through the sliding-door, to find himself in the lounge of the Adamses' flat. As he went he realized how Adams, although seeming friendly, had kept him out of the flat when Chloe had been found, on the pretence of his wife's cold—a feverish one she had forgotten the next day. At the back of his mind he had suspected Adams, but the suspicions had not come to a head until after Doc Sloane's murder. He saw everything slip easily into place, the key—as he had suspected—was a simple one, and unlocked all the doors.

Now . . .

Morrell and Chloe implicated seriously, Chloe so deeply that no court could let her go free. The Clavering-Chloe story in the Press—the trial could not be kept secret without a general outcry, that was certain.

So many things would come out that were better left unknown. Even Betty would be implicated: she would take it smiling, of course. She would do much for Andy Cunningham.

He smiled sombrely at his suspicions of Andy as he entered the study of Colonel Robert Adams. He felt weary, and his eyes were burning: he knew what he was going to do, and yet he hesitated. If Morely dreamed of it there would be ructions.

He saw another room leading from the study, and that door was locked, but there was a key on the desk. He opened the door and stepped through, and he saw a small laboratory, two gas-masks hanging on pegs, a dozen small cylinders of gas, all of them marked.

He remembered the gassing of the crowd in Piccadilly, and the list of casualties.

His lips tightened, and he picked up a small container, labelled Lewisite. He wondered in what circumstances Adams would have used the gas which killed instantaneously, and his lips were compressed in a long, thin line. He picked up a gas-mask, studied the simple mechanism of the Lewisite cylinder-cap and, carrying it with both arms for it was heavy, went back to the room where Adams, Ankrett, Grayson, and Number Three, with the woman and the gunmen, were waiting. Only Adams and Grayson were conscious, with two of the gunmen. He felt mildly curious about the identity of Number Three, and he studied him for a moment, while Farningham snapped:

"What's in your mind, Pat?"

"Thoughts. Who's the unknown, Adams?"

Adams glared. "You can go to hell."

"It will have to come out at the trial, and before," said Dawlish, and Adams swore, a stream of obscenity which seemed to colour the air. Across it came Grayson's voice:

"He was the manager at Misslethwaites'. Dawlish," there was agony in Grayson's voice, his body was quivering as he was stretched out on the floor. "There's a fortune in this! Just let me go, don't worry about the others, get me out of here and it's worth a hundred thousand. A hundred thousand!"

Dawlish contemplated him, his eyes narrowed.

"Just you alone, eh?"

"Yes, yes, I'll get the cash for you, I've got it stored."

"How were the food trains to be held up?" asked Dawlish.

"Explosives on the line, but I didn't arrange that, it was Adams' work!"

"Where are the other trains due to start from? Southampton, Liverpool, Harwich, and where?"

"Plymouth, Bristol, and Glasgow. I'll give you full particulars, Dawlish. I know when they're timed, you've got several hours to work in!"

"Drivers and stokers on those trains would have died," said

Dawlish. He was still carrying the cylinder of Lewisite, and he stepped towards the door. "Bill, clear out. You too, Morrell."

"What——" Farningham began.

"Get out!" snapped Dawlish roughly.

Farningham stared, and then obeyed, and Morrell followed him. Dawlish stepped closer to the door and rested the cylinder by it. He stepped to the sliding-panel, found the operating switch, and closed it. Adams was staring like a man possessed of the devil, and Grayson tried to get up, screaming at the top of his voice.

"Shut up," Dawlish said slowly. He stepped to Grayson, and before the man realized what was happening cracked him on the back of the head, and the butt of the gun brought unconsciousness immediately.

Adams began to swear.

"I'm told it doesn't hurt," said Dawlish. "I feel almost sorry about that, Adams."

"Why, you——"

Adams moved his right hand towards his pocket, Dawlish jumped to one side, suspecting the presence of the second gun. He fired from his pocket, while his back gave him agony, and he sent Adams' gun flying from a shattered wrist. Adams went quiet, staring at the cylinder.

Dawlish donned a gas-mask, walked to the door, kicked the cylinder control-cap open, and then stepped swiftly through into the hall.

Sir Archibald Morely, Sir Arnold Clavering, the Prime Minister, and several other Cabinet Ministers were in the room at 10, Downing Street. So was Patrick Dawlish, and Chief-Inspector Trivett.

Dawlish had been speaking for five minutes, crisply and clearly, and he did not intend to stop for long.

"And so, gentlemen, I summarized my impressions, and as you have heard, they were confirmed—there is ample testimony to that effect. I have already made a full statement, which has been signed and I believe handed to you. I understand, too, that all the details of the organization, and the localities in which the operatives were in hiding, have been located from the code papers which I took from the man Grey. The food trains were not derailed, and for that I can claim some credit—credit, gentlemen, which I submit in extenuation of the fact that I gave the Members the choice of killing themselves, or standing trial. Frankly, I hoped they would use the Lewisite. We know that they did."

Dawlish stopped, and his sombre face was relieved by a quick, transforming smile.

"And now, gentlemen, I am in your hands, completely."

It was the Prime Minister who said quietly :

"This matter, and your report, is strictly confidential, Mr. Dawlish. I can offer my thanks, and later the Government's official thanks, for your services."

"Thank you," said Dawlish, and he was glad to shake hands.

The pressure of Sir Arnold Clavering's, a moment later, was even firmer, and Dawlish's eyes smiled into the Home Secretary's.

"So your resignation doesn't take effect, sir? Another absurd rumour in the morning's Press, the Ministry of Information *should* be more careful."

He chuckled, and there was an echo from the others. He raised one eyebrow towards Morely before he went out, and walked slowly and painfully along the street, and turned left into Whitehall. As he went into the wider thoroughfare a car drew up and Farningham jumped out, while upon his heels was his Diana, her bronze hair sleek and lovely, her green-grey eyes shining.

"So you've got away with it," said Farningham, as if he could not believe his eyes.

"I was even congratulated," smiled Dawlish. "'Lo, Di. Where's Andy?"

"Waiting for you at the flat, with Morrell. Chloe's all right, and Betty'll be at the flat when we arrive, so jump in."

Dawlish jumped in, but remained thoughtful. There were several points he had learned to explain earlier mysteries. How Chloe had bought the brushes with drugs inside. Extracted the packet and believed the brushes empty when she had given them to Andy. Later she had learned that Adams, looking for a safe place to hide the papers and distrusting the other members, had used the brushes, not expecting them to be sent away: the start of the game for Dawlish. Other things, some were guessed. How Adams had followed up Morrell because of the friendship with Chloe, learned Jeffery had stolen the brushes, climbed into his room and stolen them after killing the secretary to implicate Dawlish whom he knew would soon be on the way. There was no other possible explanation; Adams would have found it easy enough to contact with Jeffery, who had been robbing Morrell for some time past. Twenty minutes later at the flat he looked round at Morrell, who seemed a new man, at Andy who looked the worse for wear, and Betty, who had never seemed fresher, at Farningham who was holding Diana's hand. He shrugged, and winced.

"*Blast* my back! Well—this seems a place for men and their ladies more than anything else; I'll go out for a drink. Unless there are any complaints——"

"Complaints!" exclaimed Morrell, "my dear Dawlish!"

Betty laughed.

"I almost wish I were going to marry you instead of Andy, Pat. You're superb!"

"I'm going to see the Assistant Commissioner," grinned Dawlish, "and he won't think so."

It was half an hour before he got away, and then he walked with Morrell as far as the end of Brook Street. Morrell was going to see Chloe, and his eyes were bright in anticipation. Dawlish laughed.

"I did you more than one injustice, Morrell."

Morrell pursed his lips. "I wonder. I've invited a great deal of criticism, but—well, shall we say that this has been good for my soul?"

"Ye-es." Dawlish frowned. "I wonder if it has for mine?"

"You did the right thing, the only thing," said Morrell soberly. "But I think you're the only man who would have contemplated doing it. You're a strange fellow, Dawlish."

And Dawlish laughed, and went to Scotland Yard and delivered up his *open sesame* card, which Morely turned over thoughtfully. The A.C. looked up and smiled soberly.

"Do you think I believe the story, Dawlish?"

"Please yourself," said Patrick Dawlish. "Facts, not fancies, my Morely; deal in them. You're not going to complain, are you?"

"I am not," said the A.C. slowly. "You were right, of course; that's the irritating part about you, you usually are. Anyhow, I can't say thanks enough, and nor can Trivett. Munk's got the idea too, I think, and"—Morely's lips curved—"Jonathan Grey sent a special message from his cell—he wants to thank you."

"Vengeful to the last, was he? Who were the Greys?"

"Chemists, both of them, who started work on the drugs angle, and also developed the gas that caused the trouble in Piccadilly—a chloroform gas and simple enough to make while taking immediate effect. Adams used them for all angles; they had a murky past as all his men had. We've rounded up two hundred and more, all men with records. Bilson—or Grayson—is wanted for murder; Larramy's real record is the foulest thing I've read. Ma Finnigan was wanted on a murder charge—she hadn't been out of that house for years; obviously the climax sent her mad. Poor beggar," added Morely slowly. "Well, Dawlish—"

"Did you get your three men out of the cellar?"

"Only one came out alive, and he didn't like it. Oh, they collected the right type. Even at Whitehall—there was a man named Cautald, a permanent official, watching their interests—he's stopped watching now. Lord, it was a thorough business! The provincial branches of Misslethwaites were all crammed with drugs, which had been brought into the country over a long period. Adams ran the firm, of course, persuading Grayson and Ankrett into it. As bad a specimen as we're likely to meet."

"I'm not sorry they don't grow on trees," said Dawlish dryly.

"Hmm. Did you know that 'Colonel' Adams was identical with Charles Mullinger, Adams?"

"I thought it likely when there was no male relative," said Dawlish. "Odd thing, sticking to the name. His wife backed him one hundred per cent, didn't she?"

"Judging from the records, she urged him on all the time. A clever woman. Dawlish—do you know, we hardly contacted with *any* of them during the whole investigation?"

Dawlish chuckled. "What, on neither day?"

"We *had* started before you came in," retorted Morely. "Don't say it, I know! How much did you guess, and how did you guess it?"

"Logical deduction," protested Dawlish gently. "Actually most things clicked into shape when I knew Clavering was being victimized. Had you any idea of his association with Chloe?"

"I was flabbergasted," admitted Morely.

"The things our politicians can do," said Dawlish. "It's a censorious world, old man, that's the cause of half the trouble. Between you and me I'm surprised how right I was."

Morely shrugged. "Luck, intelligence, or intuition—whichever it is you've got plenty of it. By the way"—he pushed a cardboard box across his desk—"a present from Scotland Yard. We won't need them for Exhibit 'A' as there's no trial."

"The brushes?" Dawlish raised an eyebrow. "Thanks, old man, I'll frame them. Odd thing is, I wasn't sure whether they contained anything. I assumed they did and asked myself what could be making all the rumpus. Queer, isn't it?"

"I'll call it uncanny," said Sir Archibald Morely, and when Dawlish had gone he repeated the word to himself—and he was not the only friend of Patrick Dawlish's who thought the same thing.

To all of which Dawlish was oblivious. There was no need to ponder problems, his mind eased out, he felt that any mental effort would be too much of a strain. And then he saw two men in uniform approaching, and he scowled.

"And I can't do a thing," he said aloud. "Not a . . ."

The two men stared, for a large, blond, tired-looking man gave sudden vent to deep-throated laughter.